METRO / A17

Murder convict ex-solon Villarosa back in Bilibid after 'medical holiday'

SPORTS / A22

Sports commission to seek aid of billionaires Tan, Sy, Zobel for Olympic gold bid

WORLD / A19

Anger over Saddam taunting spills into street demonstrations

NEWS/ A2

Ping back in Erap fold, will run for reelection in Senate

Spray-on condoms one of oddities in 2006

DITO, PINA-
KAWALAN
ANG RAPIST!

BERLIN—FROM THE Turkish Airline workers who sacrificed a camel at Istanbul airport to celebrate a job well done to the German who invented snug spray-on condoms, the world was full of offbeat news in 2006.

SPRAY-ON/ A13

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Wednesday, January 3, 2007 ★★★ 4 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 26 P18 website: inquirer.net

Comelec to Congress: No budget, no elections

By Jerome Aning and TJ Burgonio

THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS YESTERDAY called on Congress to pass the proposed national budget of P1.126 trillion for 2007, warning that the midterm polls on May 14 may not be held unless it gets enough funds.

"If Congress won't be able to pass the budget, Comelec can't conduct the elections in May.

COMELEC/ A13

Peso hits 6-year high, closes at 48.915 to US dollar

By Doris C. Dumlao

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY SIX years, the peso yesterday broke into the 48 level against the US dollar on remittances from overseas Filipino workers that piled up during the long holiday break and investments into the stock market.

The peso closed at 48.915, its strongest finish since hitting 48.90 to the greenback on March 23, 2001.

The strong peso has its advantages and disadvantages, according to economists.

It benefits the government and companies that have foreign debts, as they need fewer pesos to service their debts.

The country's foreign debt stood at $54.1 billion as of end-September last year, of which 69.6 percent is owed by the public sector.

Exporters and households, which rely on OFW remittances, are not happy with the strong peso because they end up with fewer pesos when they exchange their dollars for the local currency.

"The peso is appreciating too fast, too soon. We hardly have any time to hedge our exposure," said Ruth Santos, general manager at Craftland Exports Inc.

There are also fears that the country's domestic consumption will be adversely affected by the peso's sharp appreciation because OFW remittances

PESO HITS/ A8

GMA: I did it for US ties

Palace seeks understanding for hard decision

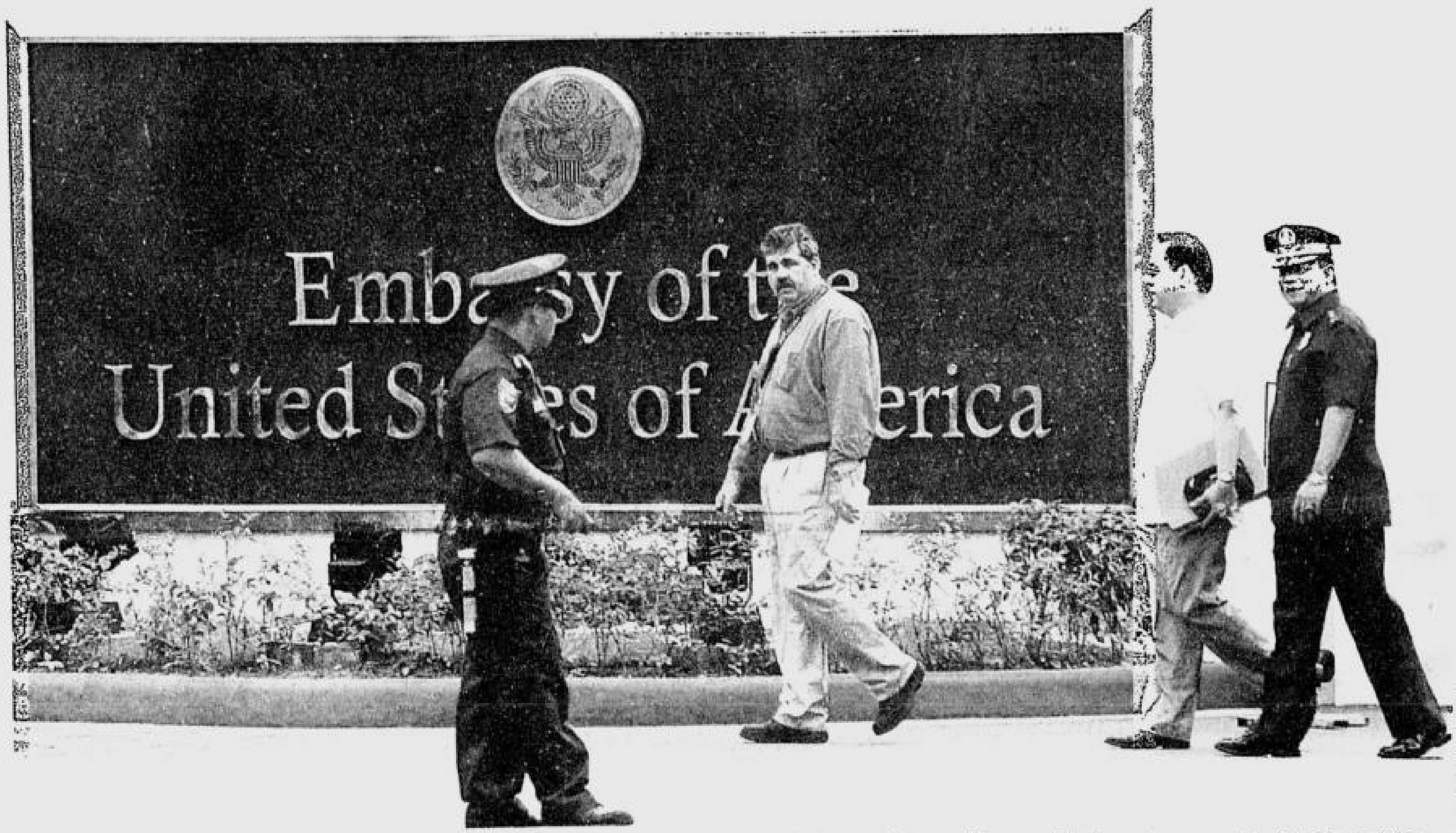
By Christine O. Avendaño, Volt Contreras and Norman Bordadora

FACED WITH MOUNTING OUTRAGE over Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith's clandestine return to US custody, President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday sought public understanding of the "difficult decision" that her administration had had to make.

She said the Dec. 29 transfer was made in order to prevent the "further deterioration" of the Philippines' ties with the United States, that the executive branch was ready to face any legal challenge, and that it was confident that the decision's "legitimacy and wisdom" would be upheld.

"This difficult decision was made and taken with only the best interest of the Philippines in mind," Ms

GMA: I DID IT/ A4



ERNIE U. SARMIENTO

THE VISIT: Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith is in solitary confinement inside a 10 x 12 room behind a steel door with a guard in the anteroom on the first floor of the Jusmag building at the US Embassy compound. Thus did Marius Corpus, DILG undersecretary who heads the custodial team (in barong) describe the detention quarters of the convicted rapist. The embassy was closed Tuesday in deference to a national day of mourning for former US President Gerald Ford. But Corpus and PNP Deputy Director for Intelligence Alejandro Lapinid (right) are allowed in by its chief of security Jake Jacob (center).

Canceled Balikatan war games back on track

By Volt Contreras

THE CANCELED RP-US MILITARY EXERCISES WERE declared "back on" yesterday—four days after Malacañang bowed to pressure and returned a convicted American Marine to US custody despite the absence of a court ruling on who should keep him. ***(Related stories on this page)***

Officials from both the Department of Foreign Affairs and the US Embassy confirmed in separate

CANCELED/ A4

Nicole's lawyers ask CA to order Smith's arrest

By Tarra V. Quismundo and Armand N. Nocum

THE MOTHER OF "NICOLE" YESTERday directed searing words at a fellow mother, President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"She is also a mother, a grandmother. What if this happens to her family?" the mother of the Filipino woman who had won a landmark rape case against a US Marine said in a phone interview.

She expressed outrage at what she called the "underground" transfer of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith back to American custody, to which, she said, the President had given "the green light."

"We (the family) have a very low morale now because we feel like we were sold out. The leadership of GMA is not good. We were all betrayed—we and all the [other] Filipinos—instead of the government helping us," she said, adding:

"Salbahe ang Presidente natin."

Nicole's lawyers, assisted by former Senators Jovito Salonga and Wigberto Tañada, yesterday asked the Court of Appeals to order the arrest of Smith, whom they described as "a fugitive from justice."

NICOLE'S/ A4

12M textbooks out of storage, set for distribution

By Fe Zamora

THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE WEATHER-proof and child-proof.

Barring any more hitches, some 12 million pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 5 will finally be reading the World Bank-funded textbooks on social studies when classes in public schools open in June.

A joint team from the Department of Education, Department of Budget and Management and representatives from civil society yesterday began a random quality inspection of 980,115 books at a Bicutan warehouse, where the books had been kept since a lower court stopped their delivery to the provinces in November.

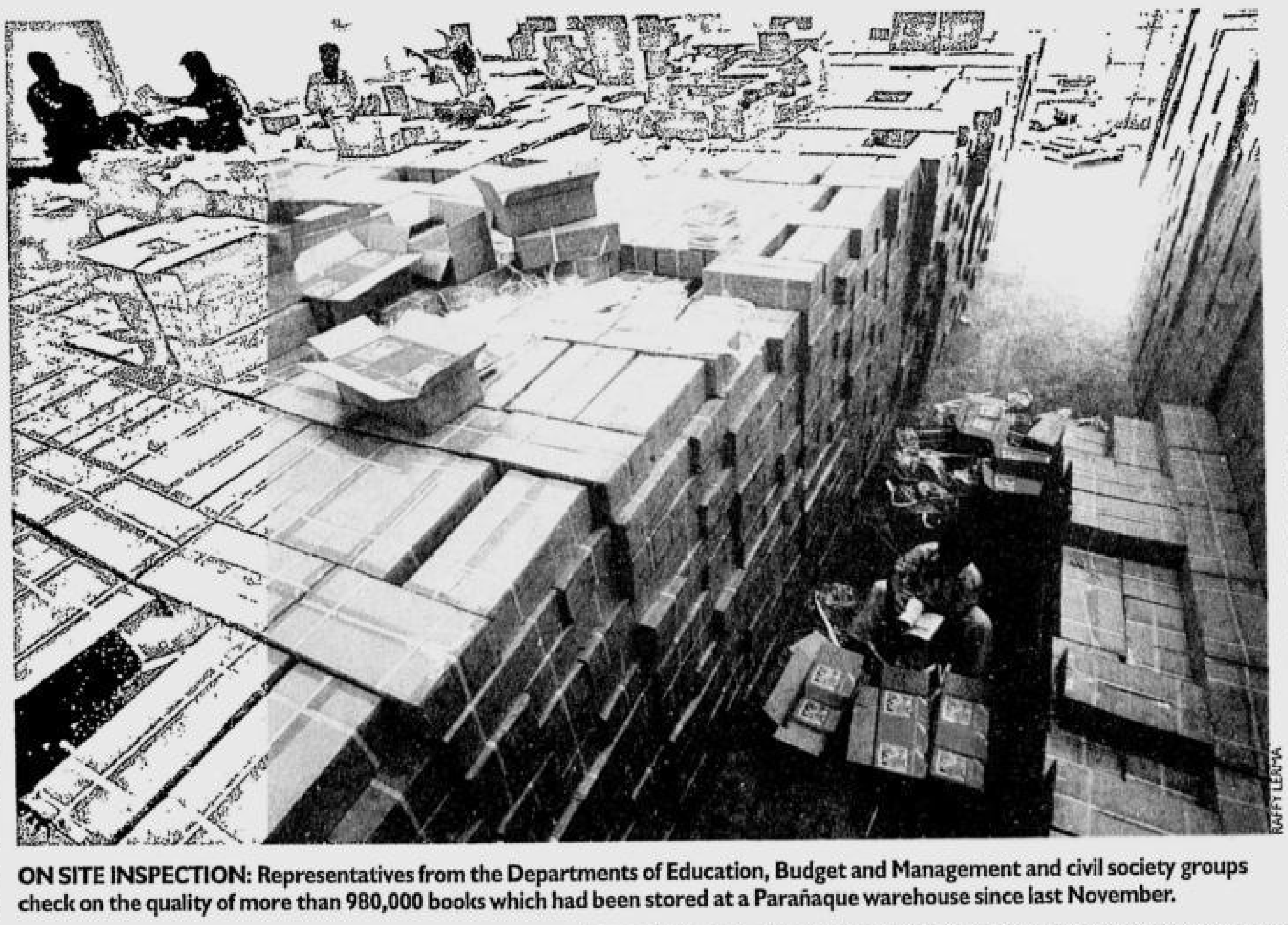
Some 11 million other copies of the book—titled "Ang Bagong Pilipino"—are kept in separate warehouses.

Boxes of books stacked as high as three meters practically dwarfed the quality inspection teams, which included volunteers.

Armed with a three-page checklist of specifications, the team members pulled pages to test the strength of the binding, and went from page to page to verify the accuracy of pagination, as well as the quality of printing.

After about an hour, the team segregated three boxes of books—about a

12M TEXTBOOKS/ A9



RAFFY LERMA

ON SITE INSPECTION: Representatives from the Departments of Education, Budget and Management and civil society groups check on the quality of more than 980,000 books which had been stored at a Parañaque warehouse since last November.

Spare the rod; spoil your kids with love

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

"YOU DID A GOOD THING."

"I'm proud of you."

"I love you."

These are the expressions of love that children yearn to hear from their parents, according to the nongovernment organization Save the Children Sweden in the Philippines.

Children aged 7 to 17 voiced these opinions during an art workshop held last month designed to encourage some 100 children, mainly from urban poor communities, to express their thoughts on discipline and relationship with parents.

Their views were consistent with the stand of SCS that children have rights and that physical and verbal abuse violate those inherent rights.

What makes the violations even more painful, SCS said, is that the abuse is dealt by people who are supposed to love and take care of them, such as parents and siblings.

The incidence of physical abuse in the Philippines has prompted SCS to call on

SPARE/ A8

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Bicol region will have rains. Visayas and Mindanao will be cloudy with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms becoming widespread rains over the eastern sections which may trigger flash-floods and landslides. The rest of the country will have mostly cloudy skies with light rainshowers.

COMPILED BY KATE PEDROSO, INQUIRER RESEARCH/01/02/07 SOURCE PAGASA

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Rains
Clark Zone	Cloudy with Rains	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Cloudy with Rains	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Rains

Lacson back in Estrada fold

By TJ Burgonio

IN A SIGN OF THAWING RELATIONS, deposed President Joseph Estrada has taken his estranged protégé, Sen. Panfilo Lacson, back to the fold, and has even included him in the United Opposition's slate for the May 14 senatorial elections.

The UNO was also wooing former Vice President Teofisto Guingona to lead its lineup and was open to endorsing actor Richard Gomez if he makes good his plan to run for senator, said Sen. Jinggoy Estrada.

After confirming his decision to withdraw from the mayoralty race in Manila, a beaming Lacson announced yesterday that the older Estrada and other UNO leaders had included him in the senatorial slate that the opposition was finalizing with other parties.

This was confirmed by Estrada's son, Jinggoy.

"I'm grateful that my name has been included in that list. So that's enough for me to be thankful for," Lacson, clad in a checkered polo shirt, said in a press briefing where he officially announced his decision not to run for mayor.

The senator indicated that he had misgivings about seeking the endorsement of anybody, but acknowledged that a public endorsement from Estrada would be a big boost to his reelection.

"Well, he has a solid 27 to 35 percent [support] of the electorate, and this has been validated so many times. This is not to take away anything from Senators Jinggoy Estrada and Loi Ejercito, but I think their affinity with former President Estrada did much to where they are now," Lacson told reporters, not knowing that Jinggoy was in the press room. "It will matter a lot in terms of vote-getting."

Later, Jinggoy raised Lacson's right arm—both were smiling—as a sign of endorsement before reporters.

"Definitely Sen. Ping Lacson is included in the opposition slate because first of all, he will not be acceptable to the administration. Sen. Lacson is a very, very winnable candidate because of his performance here in the Senate," Jinggoy told reporters. "I'm very, very happy that we'll be working with him for another three years."

Lacson wasn't included in the Estrada camp's list of senatorial candidates released last year after the two had a falling out, supposedly caused by the senator's comment that candidates need not drive up to Estrada's rest house in Rizal to get his endorsement.

The senator himself confirmed that he had an "on and off" relationship with Estrada, under whose three-year, short-lived administration Lacson had served as national police chief.

"With regards to our relationship, it blows hot and cold. Sometimes, we have misunderstandings; we have quarrels. But we still talk. So I'll leave it at that," he said.

At the briefing, Lacson officially announced that he was withdrawing from the mayoralty race in May because he would most likely be disqualified on the basis of residency.

Jinggoy, for his part, said that apart from Lacson and Guingona, UNO was also eyeing reelectionist Senate President Manuel Villar Jr., Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan, Sen. Ralph Recto and "maybe" Sen. Joker Arroyo for inclusion in the slate.

"Sen. Joker is close to Mayor [Jejomar] Binay, he might still be included, but of course, with the blessings of President Estrada," he said.

Also being considered were former Senators Loren Legarda, Vicente Sotto III, Tessie Aquino-Oreta, Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan and John Osmeña, and Representatives Francis Escudero and Alan Peter Cayetano, as well as lawyer Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III.

Gomez, earlier reported as running for Bulacan governor, had indicated that he wanted to try his luck in the senatorial elections, but the former President advised him to think about it for two weeks.

"Maybe we will try to squeeze him in since there are many aspirants," Jinggoy said. "According to [Richard] it's easier to run in a national level than in a local level."

The Estrada camp has yet to decide whether to endorse Sen. Loi or San Juan Mayor JV Ejercito.

Estrada's Puwersa ng Masa has been holding a series of talks with Villar's Nacionalista Party, the Liberal Party wing of Sen. Franklin Drilon, and Binay's PDP-Laban, among others, for a possible coalition in the mid-term elections.

SHIFTING PLANS. Sen. Jinggoy Estrada raises the hand of fellow Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson as an expression of support for the latter's candidacy in the May elections. Lacson announced his withdrawal from the mayoral race in Manila, citing residency problems, and said he planned to run for reelection in the Senate. ROGER MARGALLO

GMA urged to back 'unity' slate

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A TOP OFFICIAL OF A MAJOR BUSINESS group said President Macapagal-Arroyo should seriously consider supporting both administration and opposition bets in the coming elections as proof of her sincerity in uniting the country.

"I don't think the President is compelled to endorse a senatorial slate this year because she is not running. Why doesn't she just pick those that are good candidates, regardless of political affiliation and [who] have a good chance of winning, and just invite them into her alliance," said Francis Chua, president of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In an interview, Chua said pitting an administration slate against the opposition's unity ticket would only worsen the fractious political environment in the country.

"If she really wants to have unity, then she has to avoid direct confrontation," he said.

Chua expressed concern that the economy could take a "big hit" if politics reach fever pitch.

"I think the President should renew her drive to reconcile with the opposition because endless political bickering will lead our country nowhere," he said.

Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor concurred that the President needed to form a unity ticket in the coming elections in order not to exacerbate the heated political atmosphere.

He said the President's main goal was to strengthen her base in the Senate after a number of administration bills, including the budget, got snagged in the legislative mill.

Defensor, who himself is eyeing a seat in the Senate in the May polls, said the unity ticket would give the President a better chance of firming up her grip on the Senate.

The President would need at least eight winners in May to add to the four—Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago. Juan Ponce-Enrile, Lito Lapid and Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr.—staunch administration allies that would remain in the Senate.

Forming a unity ticket appears to be the most practical move of the President considering that opposition candidates have dominated the mock polls conducted by private survey firms in the last few weeks.

Supreme Court of the Philippines
Judicial and Bar Council
Manila

The Judicial and Bar Council (JBC) announces that the following are the candidates for the position of **ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT** which was vacated by the Hon. Reynato S. Puno when he was appointed Chief Justice on December 7, 2006:

1. BARRIOS, ROBERTO A.
2. BUZON, MARINA LOZADA
3. CRUZ, EDGARDO P.
4. DE CASTRO, TERESITA LEONARDO J.
5. DEVANADERA, AGNES VICENTA SALAYO T.
6. HORMACHUELOS, PORTIA ALIÑO
7. NACHURA, ANTONIO EDUARDO B.
8. ONG, GREGORY S.
9. REYES, RUBEN T.
10. VASQUEZ, CONRADO M. JR.
11. VILLARUZ, FRANCISCO H. JR.

Any information, written report, sworn complaint or opposition against any of the aforesaid candidates must be submitted on or before January 15, 2007 to the JBC Secretariat, 2nd Floor, Centennial Bldg., P. Faura, Manila (Tel. No. 552-9512 Fax No. 552-9598; e-mail address jbc@supremecourt.gov.ph; jbc_supremecourt@yahoo.com.ph).

January 3, 2007.

MA. LUISA D. VILLARAMA
Clerk of Court
Ex Officio Secretary

(PDI--Jan. 3, 2007)

Antigambling group vows drive vs pro-jueteng bets

By Christian V. Esguerra

A CATHOLIC CHURCH-BACKED GROUP HAS announced that it will campaign against candidates in the May elections known to be involved in "jueteng," an illegal gambling game.

Archbishop Oscar Cruz, who heads the Krusadang Bayan Laban sa Jueteng, said the group would tap its different chapters around the country to come up with a list of politicians it would campaign against.

"Since jueteng is used for political purposes, I see no reason why the crusade could not be used to counteract the political clout of these people," Cruz argued.

Cruz said some politicians were either on the take from gambling operators or were running the operations themselves.

The Lingayen-Dagupan prelate said he anticipates the proliferation of "the worst kinds of gambling" as politicians prepare for local and national mid-term elections.

"I think we would not be exceeding our task if we say, 'Don't vote for people who are gamblers or beneficiaries of gambling, whether legal or illegal,'" the archbishop said.

Cruz's announcement came after alleged jueteng lord Rodolfo "Bong" Pineda showed up in a political gathering Sunday to endorse the candidacy of his wife Lilia for governor of Pampanga. The Pinedas will challenge incumbent governor Mark Lapid, son of Sen. Lito Lapid.

ARCHBISHOP Cruz

Early last year, Cruz sparked a Senate inquiry into the jueteng controversy when he alleged that the underground betting operations had grown by the millions under the Arroyo administration.

He paraded witnesses who claimed that jueteng's influence on Philippine politics went from the town level all the way up to the executive branch.

Cruz submitted to senators a list of alleged jueteng lords, declaring that the real "evil of gambling" involved, not the bettors, but the operators.

"They're the ones who throw the money, and bring it elsewhere," he said. "They're the ones who corrupt our election process."

Troops hunting Bali bombers

AT LEAST FIVE MEMBERS OF THE JEMAAH Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group, including two Bali bombers, are hiding with Muslim extremists in southern Philippines, a military official said yesterday.

"There may be more than five but so far, we have identified five of them," said Brig. Gen. Juancho Sabban, adding they are being sheltered by the Abu Sayyaf group in Jolo.

"The Abu Sayyaf is protecting them because they cannot operate on their own in the Philippines," said Sabban whose troops have been hunting the Abu Sayyaf band in the jungles of Jolo since August last year.

He said military intelligence confirmed the presence of the five JI members in Jolo but the only ones whose names were released were Indonesians, Dulmatin and Patek who are wanted for assembling and detonating bombs in nightclubs in the Indonesian island resort of Bali in 2002, killing more than 200.

The JI is believed to be the southeast Asian arm of the al-Qaida terror network. The Abu Sayyaf, which is blamed for the worst terror attacks in the Philippines, also has links to al-Qaida.

Both the JI and the Abu Sayyaf are on Washington's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Last week, the military said it recovered what it believes are the remains of Abu Sayyaf leader Khadaffy Janjalani from a shallow grave in Jolo. *AFP*

Cooking gas price raised by P1.12/kilo

By Abigail L. Ho

CONSUMERS ARE IN FOR A not-so-happy new year after all as oil firms yesterday raised prices of liquefied petroleum gas by P1.12 a kilogram to reflect the increase in international prices of the product.

Petron Corp.'s Gasul led the hikes at 12:01 a.m., followed by Chevron Phil.'s Caltex LPG at noon and Total Phil.'s TotalGaz at 6 p.m. yesterday.

With the announced price adjustment, LPG prices jumped by P12.32 per 11kg cylinder, inclusive of the 12-percent value-added tax.

'Cost pressures'

Petron said it had to hike LPG prices "to start reflecting the cumulative increase in international contract prices for December and January."

"It must be noted that we did not move LPG prices in December despite an equivalent increase in contract prices by P1.20 per kilogram. For January, the contract price increase is equivalent to P1.80 per kilogram," it said in a statement.

Petron said that its last LPG price increase was implemented in September. It has reduced prices three times since then.

Chevron said it adjusted its LPG prices because of "cost pressures."

According to data from the Department of Energy, the international contract price for LPG soared to $527.50 per metric ton (MT) this month, from $490.50 per MT in December.

The last time the oil firms increased LPG prices was in September, the international contract price for the product had surged to $560.90 per MT. It then fell to $483.50 per MT in October, which prompted the oil companies to announce a price reduction that month. The price further fell to $464 per MT in November.

With this new price increase, LPG prices in Metro Manila will now range from P455.80 to P521.16 per 11kg cylinder. This already includes the 12-percent VAT.

AMERICA'S ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT

Ford almost died in RP in '44

By Percy D. Della
Correspondent

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA—GERALD R. Ford, America's accidental president almost perished in a shipboard accident in the Philippines during World War II.

Ford died at 93 last week at his home in Rancho Mirage, the desert oasis in California's Riverside County he and wife Betty had called home since leaving the White House in 1977.

Fresh from Yale Law School in 1941, Ford launched a law practice in Grand Rapids, Michigan. But a few months after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor he joined the United States Navy and got assigned eventually aboard the new light aircraft carrier Monterey.

According to Ford's Transcript of Naval Service, he served as assistant navigator, athletic officer and anti-aircraft battery officer aboard the Monterey. The ship participated in many actions in the Pacific, including the Battle of the Philippine Sea in 1944, dubbed the mother of all carrier battles of the war.

Although the aircraft carrier escaped that skirmish unscathed, it was one of several ships in Admiral William Halsey's Third Fleet ravaged by a typhoon while in Philippine waters.

In a narrative of Ford's service history, the US Naval Historical Center in Washington D.C. said the fleet lost three destroyers and 800 men during the typhoon in December of 1944.

"The Monterey was damaged by a fire which was started by several of the ship's aircraft tearing loose from their cables and colliding during the storm," the transcript said.

Continued the transcript: "During the storm, Ford narrowly missed being a casualty himself. After Ford left his battle station on the bridge of the ship in the early morning of 18 December, the ship rolled twenty-five degrees which caused Ford to lose his footing and slide toward the edge of the deck. The two inch steel ridge around the edge of the carrier slowed him enough so he could roll and twisted into the catwalk below the deck."

"I was lucky; I could have easily gone overboard," the transcript quoted the future 38th president of the United States as saying.

The storm damaged the ship beyond repair and Ford spent the remainder of the war on shore. He was discharged in 1946 as a lieutenant commander.

Resuming his interrupted law practice, Ford signed on with a local law firm in Grand Rapids and soon became a leader of former servicemen campaigning for veterans' housing.

His advocacy of GI rights led him to politics in 1948 when he challenged and won against US Rep. Bartel J. Jonkman, an isolationist Republican representing the 5th District of Michigan for the Republican nomination.

Ford's election in the fall with 61 percent of the vote was routine in the 5th District, which had last sent a Democrat to Congress in 1910.

And the rest, as the say, is history.

FORD as US President...

... As Navy officer

New Year revelry injuries up 64%

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE NUMBER OF FILIPINOS HURT IN New Year revelry has climbed to 1,212, a 64-percent increase from the 744 reported injured last year.

The Department of Health said 50 percent of all firecracker-related injuries involved children less than 14 years old. Victims younger than 10 years old comprised 26 percent of the victims.

Officially, the DOH said it still registered no deaths due to firecrackers or stray bullets. But a 6-month-old baby was delivered prematurely and died at the Philippine General Hospital after the mother was hit by a wayward bullet, reported Dr. Enrique Tayag, chief of the DOH National Epidemiology Center.

Tayag said only the mother, who survived, was included on the list of 36 stray bullet victims.

Most of the injuries were caused by firecrackers led by "*kwitis*" (baby rockets) which accounted for 133 injuries, according to the DOH.

Second most dangerous was "five star" which wounded 120 people.

Third among the most injurious firecrackers, the "piccolo"—which ostensibly was designed for children—accounted for the biggest number of young victims. A cheap and seemingly harmless firecracker ignited by scratching the sticks on a rough surface, it caused 64 burn injuries, 40 eye injuries, and an amputation.

Likely victims

"Children are more likely to be hit by firecrackers because of their reflexes," Tayag explained. The DOH has recommended that children below 15 years should not be allowed to handle any pyrotechnic device.

"*Triangulo*" was the fourth leading cause with 78 victims, followed by "*pla-pla*" which injured 75. "*Boga*," a bazooka-like device made from PVC pipe, injured a total of 68 people as of yesterday.

The figures also include 159 people who were injured on Jan. 1, mostly from firecrackers that had failed to explode on New Year's Eve.

Tayag noted that the number of firecracker victims also increased yesterday because the public had been encouraged to seek medical treatment for any type of injury, whether major or minor.

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Diesel shipment seized

THE COAST GUARD has apprehended a motor tanker with 600,000 liters of diesel that it suspects may be smuggled.

The MT Patricia, which had come from Subic and is operated by Bunkers Manila Inc., was apprehended at the Pasig River on New Year's Day after the inspection of its documents at the PCG checkpoint.

According to Pasig Coast Guard Station Commander Wifred Burgos, the crew of the MT Patricia presented papers indicating that the tanker had a permit to unload its oil cargo at the foreign vessels M/V Mol Aspiration and M/V Saipan Winner docked at the Manila South Harbor.

When the PCG questioned the crew about this, the latter said the two vessels were not at the South Harbor and that they intended to go to the Nagtahan depot instead, Burgos added.

He said the PCG decided to apprehend the MT Patricia because its permit only covered the transfer of its cargo to the two vessels at the South Harbor. *Leila B. Salaverria*

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GMA: I did it for US ties

From page A1

Arroyo said in a statement.

"I therefore ask Filipinos to stand by it and to stand behind our alliance with the United States to fight terror and poverty," she said.

Malacañang had been relatively quiet about Smith's in-the-dead-of-night transfer to the US Embassy, until Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said that the President supported the move.

The action has prompted not only the camp of "Nicole," the Filipino woman whom Smith was convicted of raping, to file contempt charges against Ms Arroyo's top officials *(Story on Page A1)* but also lawmakers and a number of groups to warn that it could lead to a constitutional crisis.

Only custody issue

Ms Arroyo sought to assure the public that Smith's return to US custody would not affect the soldier's criminal case.

"I wish to appeal for understanding from the people that this action will not affect the substantive issues at bar, not impede justice and the rule of law," she said.

The President was echoing what her officials had earlier said—that Smith's transfer from the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy was in keeping with the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement, which stipulates US custody of accused American military personnel during the trial and when the case is on appeal.

"The government had to take this action in order to forestall the further deterioration in our strategic relationship with the United States, which was being rapidly eroded by our noncompliance with the [VFA]," Ms Arroyo said.

In his own statement, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said Smith's transfer was carried out based on "a legal opinion" rendered by the Department of Justice on the agreement he signed last Dec. 22 with US Ambassador Kristie Kenney.

Romulo said Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon's order to keep Smith at the city jail was "merely a temporary one pending an agreement by relevant authorities" like the foreign secretary on the convict's "proper facilities for his detention."

In that agreement with Kenney, Romulo said, Smith would remain "deprived of his liberty while at the US Embassy and will not be taken out of the country."

He said the agreement also granted Philippine authorities "access" to Smith's place of detention.

But Romulo's statement was silent on why the transfer was made without orders from the Court of Appeals, where Smith's custody dispute was still pending, and in which the Department of Foreign Affairs had participated with a clear intention to wait for the proper resolution.

No malice

Moving to put out the fire, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno denied that the Philippine government was conniving with US authorities to allow Smith's eventual flight.

"People are attributing malice where there is none," Puno said in his first news conference to explain Smith's return to US custody despite the absence of a court order.

Puno admitted that the move did not "sit well with many people." Like Ms Arroyo, he appealed for understanding from the public, saying the government wanted Smith to suffer for his crime once the judicial processes had been exhausted and his conviction upheld.

"Get mad at us when he flees the country ... There are no funny games here, no hidden agenda, no personal interest. We're not part of any complicity to spirit him away. What you see is what you get," he said.

Puno said the Department of Interior and Local Government had received an assurance from Washington that Smith would not be allowed to leave the country until the end of the appeals process.

He said that if Smith's conviction would be upheld by higher Philippine courts, the soldier would be committed to the national penitentiary.

"If there's any hidden agenda here, you would have already seen it," Puno said.

He also denied that there was "lackeyism" on the part of the Philippine government and that it was cowed into returning Smith to US custody when the American authorities announced the cancellation of this year's RP-US Balikatan war games.

"We're not afraid of anybody. How can that be when we bodily carried him to the city jail? That was the order of [Pozon's] court and we promptly implemented it," Puno said.

Better conditions

Smith, 21, is back in conditions "certainly better than a jail," looking forward to a visit from his family this month, and finding comfort in a two-inch stack of Christmas cards from people who believe he did not rape a Filipino woman.

But the soldier now sleeps in a room different from where he earlier stayed and where his coaccused buddies (since acquitted and flown out of the country) had claimed seeing "ghosts," according to his spiritual adviser, Fr. James Reuter.

The 90-year-old American Jesuit, who had maintained early on that Smith was wrongfully accused, yesterday talked about how "Dan" had settled back into US custody.

Reuter said Smith—who did time at the crowded Makati City Jail in a room separate from the other inmates—was "generally in good spirits and cheerful" about his return to US custody.

He said he visited the soldier at the US Embassy in the afternoon of Dec. 31. (He visited Smith four times at the city jail.)

"It was still real incarceration," the priest said on the phone, adding that two US Marine guards posted outside Smith's room would not allow the soldier past the door.

The room itself, as he recalled seeing that day, was practically bare except for a bed.

"But certainly it was better than a jail," he said, adding that, for instance, he felt "no suffocation" inside the room even in the absence of air conditioning.

"It made life easier for him," the priest said.

Family visit

In his hourlong talk with Smith that afternoon, Reuter said, the soldier mentioned his family's plan to visit him on "Jan. 15 at the earliest."

The priest said that in his own correspondence with the Smiths—the soldier's parents, an elder brother aged 24, and a younger brother aged 18, all based in St. Louis, Missouri—they said they would like to come but were frightened of the media and the crowds "after seeing on TV what happened inside the courtroom [on Dec. 4, the day of Smith's conviction]."

Apart from minding the expenses for the trip, Reuter said, "they are afraid they might be manhandled [when they get here]; that's why somehow they would like to have security."

During the New Year's Eve visit, Smith showed Reuter the stack of Christmas cards from people who expressed "support" when he was still at the Makati jail.

"He was grateful to everyone" and did not voice any complaints about his stay at the jail or "harsh words" against Nicole, Reuter said.

At least during the priest's visit, Smith was staying in the room that earlier held Lance Cpl. Chad Carpentier, one of the other co-accused Marines, during their four-month marathon trial.

"I also blessed that room, which used to be Chad's, because the guards said the other three [co-accused] were complaining that they had seen ghosts," Reuter said without elaborating.

'In solitary confinement'

By Norman Bordadora

A FIVE-PERSON PHILIPPINE custodial team assigned to check whether Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith continues to be in detention at the US Embassy sees no need for surprise visits, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno said.

"He's in solitary confinement. He is actually better off in the Makati City Jail," Interior Undersecretary Marius Corpus said after the team visited Smith for the first time yesterday afternoon.

Air conditioning

"The only advantage he has is that he has air conditioning," Corpus said, referring to the centralized air conditioning of the Jusmag building in the embassy compound, where Smith is detained in one of the rooms on the first floor.

Puno, who has supervision of the custodial team composed of jail management and police officials, said it would be very difficult for US authorities to spring Smith because the team could check on him any time it wanted.

"I presume they will not do that. Besides, where else can he go? We presume good faith on the part of the US, especially since they have committed to allow access to Smith inside their embassy," Puno said.

"That is unprecedented and even goes beyond any [provision of the VFA]," he said.

Puno said the members of the Philippine custodial team were Corpus; Chief Supt. Clarito Jover, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology officer in charge; Senior Supt. Serafin Barretto, BJMP-Metro Manila regional director; Director Alejandro Lapinid, Philippine National Police deputy director for intelligence; and Senior Supt. Mario San Diego, PNP deputy director for legal services.

"We will check on him regularly. Perhaps, we can check on him every day in the first week, every other day in the second week and then every day again in the next," Puno said.

"If he will be taken away, we'd know," he said.

According to Puno's order, the custodial team will visit Smith collectively or individually to ensure that the VFA is being complied with and that Smith will not be taken outside the country.

Culinary arts

Corpus said Smith had a bed, a table with four chairs supposedly for his visitors, and magazines and a sketchpad to keep him occupied.

"I told him he'd have a lot of time honing his drawing skills," Corpus said. "It seems he's into cooking. His magazines are on culinary arts."

By Corpus' account, Smith is under military detention at the embassy. He is behind a steel door and a US Marine stands guard in an anteroom.

Smith is not allowed to leave the building, said Corpus. But he is allowed to go to an adjacent gym room to exercise.

Nicole's lawyers ask Court of Appeals to order Smith's arrest

From page A1

They also asked the appellate court to cite for indirect contempt Smith, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno and a number of other officials responsible for the soldier's release last Dec. 29 from the Makati City Jail and transfer to the US Embassy in Manila.

"The release was actually an assisted escape, and a blatant defiance of the resolution of the Court of Appeals, dated Dec. 18, 2006. It constitutes a crime under Articles 223 and 241 of the Revised Penal Code," the lawyers said.

Article 223, which deals with "Infidelity in the Custody of Prisoners," penalizes officials "who shall consent to the escape of a prisoner."

Article 241 penalizes officials "who shall assume judicial power or shall obstruct the execution of any order or decision rendered by any judge within his jurisdiction."

Breach of judicial process

Smith was moved from the Makati City Jail, where he had been held since Dec. 4, to the US Embassy on the agreement of American diplomats and Philippine officials.

The move was made despite the soldier's plea for transfer pending at the appellate court. Philippine and US officials involved in the transfer said it was in compliance with the debated RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement, but Nicole's camp called it a breach of judicial process.

Nicole's lawyers yesterday said that "since the judgment of conviction of [Smith] has become final and executory, he must now serve sentence in a Philippine jail."

They said it was for this reason that they were seeking a warrant for the soldier's arrest.

In an omnibus motion, Nicole's private lawyer Evalyn Ursua said Smith's transfer was illegal because it was neither authorized by the appellate court nor Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon, who had ordered Smith's commitment to the Makati City Jail after convicting him of rape.

Ursua said the appellate court should dismiss outright Smith's pending petition because he was now considered a fugitive from justice.

She said that based on the Supreme Court decision in People v Del Rosario et al., a defendant who escaped from prison was deemed to have withdrawn his appeal, thus rendering the court's judgment final.

"If the court were to still take cognizance of [Smith's] appeal, the court would in effect be rewarding [him], a convicted criminal, for his escape. Taking cognizance of his appeal would be to countenance the blatant affront to the power of the court that [he] committed by his escape. It would be against the rule of law," Ursua said.

Unlawful interference

In a separate petition, Salonga, a former Senate president, and Tañada asked the appellate court to cite for indirect contempt those involved in Smith's transfer.

Aside from Puno and Smith, the others named respondents were the President's chief legal counsel Sergio Apostol, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez and Makati City Jail Warden Deogracias Tapaday.

The petitioners argued that the respondent government officials had committed "unlawful interference."

They said the issue of whether the Philippine or the US government should take custody of Smith was actually brought before the appellate court by the respondents themselves.

But after failing to secure a temporary restraining order on the implementation of Pozon's Dec. 12 order denying Smith's motion for reconsideration, the respondents "unilaterally and in utter disregard and disrespect for the [appellate court], took the law into their own hands and forcibly transferred custody over Smith to the Americans," the petitioners said.

"This is misbehavior on the part of ... Apostol and Gonzalez, both of whom are members of the bar and, thus, officers of this Court," the petitioners added.

Salonga told reporters that Ms Arroyo's approval of Smith's transfer was an impeachable offense.

He said that after the two failed attempts to impeach Ms Arroyo, the right time to file another impeachment complaint would be after the May 2007 elections.

Disbarment

Nicole's camp will also seek the disbarment of all the government lawyers who had a hand in Smith's transfer.

International legal studies expert Harry Roque told the INQUIRER that there were three persons on the list so far—Apostol, Gonzalez and Interior Undersecretary Marius Corpus.

Roque said the disbarment case—which would be filed within the week before the Supreme Court—had the full support of Salonga and Tañada.

"We believe the court will give priority to the case because of what these people have done to our justice system," he said.

Ursua told reporters that the lawyers who authorized Smith's transfer also violated "our code of responsibility as officers of the court."

"We lawyers are officers of the court, and one of our basic duties is to promote the proper administration of justice and respect for the court," she said, adding:

"We cannot just defy a court order, and whoever does that has to answer to the court. It is clear that we have a basis to file a petition for disbarment [against these lawyers].

"This is no longer a fight for Nicole. This is for the rule of law."

Gonzalez, however, displayed indifference to the move of Nicole's camp.

He said Ursua was merely trying to gain media mileage: "Tell her thank you, and I'm not affected. I'm giving her the opportunity to get publicity; that is what she wants, anyway." Gonzalez also said Smith was not a fugitive from justice because he was being detained at the US Embassy.

GMA has no respect for judge

Nicole's mother said every Filipino should learn from her family's experience.

"I thought it was over when we got a conviction. My children are very upset because we have been spending so much; we are going through hardships because of this case," she said. "This is injustice. The President is unfair."

The mother also said Nicole and the rest of her family went to court "because we believed in the process—and then the President will just set all that all aside."

"This is why other countries do not have a high regard for Filipinos ... because we allow ourselves to be had," she said.

The mother reiterated that she had used up her savings in her 25 years of working in the Navy to back her daughter's fight. In an earlier interview, she estimated that the family spent P2.3 million throughout the yearlong court proceedings, including travel and food expenses and the cost of duplicating voluminous court documents.

"We get justice and then she (Ms Arroyo) won't respect the judge ... Who else benefits from the VFA but government officials?" the mother said.

Protest rally

Despite the threat of rain, around 50 members of the Task Force Subic Rape (TFSR) held a rally yesterday in support of the contempt charges filed by Nicole's camp.

The demonstrators marched down Kalaw Avenue in Manila toward the Court of Appeals, carrying banners and placards that read "Beware of DFA, our daughters are in danger," "Gloria, DOJ, DFA: US puppets," "Daniel Smith is the fugitive," and "Uphold the dignity and sovereignty of the Filipino."

Jess del Prado of the Kilusan Para sa Pambansang Damokrasya said his group was protesting Smith's transfer to the US Embassy.

"This group also calls for the ouster of GMA for her disregard of existing laws," he said, adding that the TFSR was planning to launch more protest actions. *With reports from Edson C. Tandoc Jr., Margaux C. Ortiz and Joba Botana, trainee*

Canceled Balikatan war games back on track

From page A1

phone interviews that Balikatan 2007 would proceed.

"Yes, that's correct. The Balikatan will go forward ... now that both governments are in compliance with the Visiting Forces Agreement," US Embassy spokesperson Matthew Lussenhop said.

Lussenhop said the custody dispute over Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith was "no longer an issue."

The detention of Sinith at the Makati City Jail after Judge Benjamin Pozon convicted him of raping Filipino woman "Nicole" had prompted the US government to cancel this year's exercises.

DFA spokesperson Ed Malaya said that the annual war games would now "push through, and the announcement of the details will be made by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and US military authorities in the next few days."

The US action in canceling the exercises had been widely seen as a sign of Washington's displeasure over Smith's continued incarceration at the Makati jail despite the Philippine executive branch's concurrence with his court pleadings to be returned to US custody.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said Malacañang was informed about the resumption of the exercises only after yesterday's National Security Council meeting, which President Macapagal-Arroyo chaired, to discuss among others, the controversy over Smith's transfer to US custody.

"We did not expect it immediately but we got the text (from Malaya) after the meeting," Bunye told reporters.

Asked whether the US decision had to do with Manila's move to transfer Smith back to US custody, Bunye said the US Embassy was "in a better position to explain that action."

Asked if it indicated that Washington was using the cancellation of the war games to pressure on Manila, Bunye merely reiterated Ms Arroyo's statement on the Smith controversy.

Protecting their own

"Whatever action taken by the Philippine government was done in the interest of maintaining the strategic relationship between our two countries. Whatever will happen later will be consonant with the long-term objective of both countries," he said.

On Dec. 22, the chief of the US Pacific command, Adm. William Fallon, announced the cancellation of Balikatan '07 after the Makati Regional Trial Court refused to turn over Smith to US custody.

Fallon was quoted in a New York Times report as saying he had to guarantee the safety of his forces and that he was also halting US military aid and reconstruction programs until he was confident the troops' legal rights would be protected under the VFA.

Fallon also ordered the withdrawal of an aid team in the Philippines that was assessing the needs of a typhoon-ravaged area and canceled a number of visits by American ships, the Times added.

AFP pleased

The Philippine military yesterday said it was "looking forward" to the resumption of war games with the United States.

"We are looking forward to the continuation of exercises after the issues have been cleared," said Armed Forces of the Philippines public information chief Lt. Col. Bartolome Bacarro.

"If the Balikatan continues, it will be beneficial to the AFP because of the exchange in training," he added.

Bacarro spoke to reporters before news of the US decision to resume the exercises broke.

Mutual learning

Bacarro said that both sides would be on the losing end if this year's Balikatan exercises were suspended.

He said that while Filipino troops were receiving training on the use of new weapons, the Americans themselves were getting trained on guerrilla tactics.

"They also learn from us. They learn jungle survival and guerrilla warfare," Bacarro said.

The 1999 RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement paved the way for the return of US troops to the country for large-scale military exercises after the Philippines in 1992 decided not to renew its military bases treaty with the United States.

Conflicting opinions

The US government, with the concurrence of the Arroyo administration, had insisted on having custody of Smith, citing what it said was a provision in the VFA that American servicemen charged criminally in the Philippines should remain under US custody until all judicial proceedings were completed.

VFA provisions on custody over Americans charged with crimes have provoked conflicting opinions among legal minds in the country.

The US and Philippine governments said that in Smith's case, the legal processes were not yet finished because his conviction by a trial court would still be reviewed by an appellate court.

Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon cited the same provision as basis for his order to send Smith to the Makati jail after sentencing him to 40-year imprisonment for raping "Nicole" at the Subic Bay Freeport. *With reports from Christine O. Avendaño and Dona Pazzibugan*

HOUSE BILL No. 345: A TROJAN HORSE IN DISGUISE

An Appeal by the Business Community to Discard House Approved Across-the-Board Wage Increase

Perhaps unwittingly, the House of Representatives may have created a Trojan Horse ticking like a bomb in passing House Bill No. 345 that mandates a P125 per day across-the-board wage increase over a period of three years, retroactive 01 October 2006.

With looming social, political and economic repercussions that will be brought about by this surreptitious and undue action waiting to unfold. The question is: From where will the Statesman emerge to save the economy from this impending catastrophe?

A tale of the classic game "Trip to Jerusalem" unfolds where the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Office of the President are major players, each equally capable of defusing the ticking bomb and emerge as the true Statesman.

We hope the Lower House will take action and defuse it even before it reaches the Senate. We hope the Senate defuses it if the Lower House transmits it to them, and, we hope the President will veto the Bill if both the legislative bodies refuse to put the interest of the nation above political considerations.

Coming at a time when the economy is under pressure to move faster amidst global and domestic challenges, a legislated wage increase undermines the viability of most of the country's businesses, particularly the small and medium enterprises that are providing jobs to most Filipinos.

Implementing the proposed wage increase will result to a staggering 1.2 trillion pesos additional labor costs in the next three years. An increase of such magnitude, not related to productivity, will surely result to the demise of enterprises.

A legislated salary increase for all private sector workers will cause a chain reaction of disastrous proportions such as unprecedented spiraling cost-push inflation, massive job losses and minimal use of labor-intensive operations or technology.

We, the undersigned representatives of the Philippine business community, are united in rejecting the legislated wage increase and call for the strengthening of the regional wage boards.

Donald G. Dee
President, Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI)

Francis A. Chua
President, Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Inc. (FFCCCII)

Rene Soriano
President, Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP)

Ramon Y. Sy
President, Bankers Association of the Philippines

Ramon Del Rosario, Jr.
President, Makati Business Club

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President, Philippines Inc.

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Roberto Amores
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Direct Selling Association Of The Phils., Inc.

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President, Filipino Shipowners Association

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President, Guild Of Philippine Jewellers, Inc.

Ismael P. Penado
National President, Junior Chamber International Philippines

Henry L. Gow
President, Packaging Institute Of The Philippines

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EVP/CEO, Pharmaceutical And Healthcare Association Of The Philippines. Incorporated

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President, Philippine Association Of Electrical Industries, Inc.

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President, Philippine Association Of Flour Millers, Inc.

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Ma. Carmen B. Ilagan
Executive Director, Philippine Chamber Of Food Manufacturers, Inc.

Rodel Emmanuel C. Adiviso
Chairman & President, Philippine Chamber Of Industrial Estates & Ecozones

Michael Francis A. Dela Cruz
President, Philippine Chamber Of The Pharmaceutical Industry, Inc.

Renato B. Garcia
President, Philippine Electronics & Telecommunications Federation

Robert Trota
President, Philippine Franchise Association, Inc.

Nilo H. Gajo
President, Philippine Integrated Truckers & Haulers Organization

Doris Magsaysay Ho
President, Philippine Inter-Island Shipping Association, Inc.

Erich H. Lingad
President, Philippine International Seafreight Forwarders Ass'n., Inc.

Wellington Y. Tong
President, Philippine Iron And Steel Institute

Reynold Siy
President, Philippine Iron And Steel Traders Association

Peter G. Coyiuto
President, Philippine Life Insurance Association, Inc.

Josefina C. Maitim
Executive Director, Philippine Liner Shipping Association

Tomas C. Banguis, Jr.
President, Philippine Marketing Association, Inc.
Jerry Hui
President, Philippine Metalcasting Association, Inc.

Sebastian M. dela Merced
Chairman, Philippine Petroleum Sea Transport Association, Inc.

Kwan Ming Dee
President, Philippine Rubber Industries Association, Inc.

Vicente Ng
President, Philippine Stationers Association, Inc.

V. Francisco D. Varua
President, Philippine Sugar Millers Association, Inc.

Jose C. Clemente III
President, Philippine Travel Agencies Association

John R. Perfecto
President, Philippine Welding Products Manufacturers Association, Inc.

Jacob L. Bacani
President Philippine Welding Society, Inc.

Edgardo Limon
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Salvador V. Garza
President, Screenprinting And Imaging

Association Of The Phils.
Alfonso C. Supetran
President, Soap & Detergent Association Of The Philippines

Benedicta D. Baladad
President, Tax Management Association Of The Philippines, Inc.

Go Cun Uy
President, Textile Producers Association Of The Phils., Inc

Alina Suarez
President - Confederation of Philippine Exporters Foundation (Cebu), Inc. (PHILEXPORT-CEBU)

Lucia De Belen
President, Association of Accesory Mfrs. & Exporters of the Phils. (AAMEP)

George T. Barcelon
Chairman, Association of Phil. Leathergoods Exporters & Mfrs. (APLEM)

Violeta Luna
President, Bulacan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI)

Mariane Villa-real
President, Christmas Decor Producers & Exporters Assn. of the Phils. (CDPEAP)

Cora Purification
President, Federation of Cutflowers & Ornamental Growers of the Philippines (O'FLOWERS)

Eliseo Miranda
President, Foreign Buyers Association, Inc. (FOBAP)

Benjamin Kalalo, Jr.
President, GTH Phils.

Emilia Cuenca
President, Home Accents Group of the Philippines, Inc. (HAPI)

Peter Zuñiga
President, Meycauayan Jewelry Industry Association, Inc. (MJIA)

Eddie Jose
President, Motor Vechicle Parts Manufacturing Association of the Phils. (MVPMAP)

Albert De Rivera
President, Philippine Chamber of Handicraft Industries (PCHI)

Fermin Tarue
President, Philippine Software Association (PSA)

Rosalinda Miguel
President, Phil. Toy and Novelty MAnufacturers Association, Inc. (PHILTOY)

Marianito R. Alcala
Chairman, Wooden Gifts & Accesories Manufacturers Assn., Inc. (WOODTAG)

Ma. Luisa R. Romero
Chairman, Philippines - Saudi Business Council

Renato Sanico
Chairman, Cement Manufacturers Association of the Philippines

Meneleo Carlos III
President, Samahan sa Pilipinas ng mga Industriyang Kimika

ADVT

UP MUSEUM
Sen. Edgardo J. Angara, Rep. Cynthia Villar and university officials lead by UP President Emerlinda Roman and UP-Manila Chancellor Ramon Arcadio lay the time capsule at the recent groundbreaking of the University of the Philippines' Archives -Museum building at the Philippine General Hospital. The archives-museum will house the medical memorabilia collected over 100 years and will serve as exhibit area for artworks and historical pieces. Angara, a former UP president, is the chairman of the museum executive committee.

CUTTING BOTH WAYS

Downside of OFW remittances cited

By Jerome Aning

IT'S NOT HOW MANY DOLLARS WERE SENT, it's how they were spent.

The Labor Department's chief researcher, commenting on this year's record-breaking $12-billion dollar remittances from overseas Filipino workers, said the inflows "do not automatically result in increased income for the migrant's family if this induces family members to alter their lifestyle or behavior."

Ma. Luisa Gigette Imperial, director of the Institute of Labor Studies, noted that some family members of OFWs spend their dollars on luxury consumer goods. Some do not exert efforts to look for jobs and depend solely on the remittance income.

In a paper titled "Overseas Employment as a Development Strategy," she urged government to do more to enhance the impact of remittances on development.

Imperial, who earlier warned against "romanticizing" overseas deployment, said the unwise use of remittances could have a social effect on the families left behind.

Disincentive

"Remittances may act as a disincentive for family members to work, or for children to do well in school because remittances are seen as a guarantee of continuous flow of money," she said.

"Also, lured by material rewards, young people and even children acquire ambitions of becoming overseas workers themselves," Imperial added.

She concedes that remittances have "expansionary effects" no matter how they are spent. For example, OFW families were dominant real estate buyers in the Philippines, thereby stimulating the labor-intensive construction industry. Expenditures on food and education can also be viewed as investments in human capital.

However, Imperial said it would benefit the country even more if there were more OFW families investing remittances in entrepreneurial activities.

'Piggy banks'

What the government could do, according to Imperial, is to adopt policies that would lower the cost of remittance transfers, use remittances to strengthen financial systems, and enhance the impact of remittances by encouraging migrants to invest collectively in their communities. It is estimated that 20 to 30 percent of OFW income is not even remitted home. It remains idle in foreign banks or "piggy banks."

Such policies, she said, have already been formulated for developing countries by the International Organization for Migration and all the Philippine government needs to do is to implement them while minimizing the social costs of overseas deployment.

Also, overseas-based hometown associations should be encouraged to do more than just investing in small-scale and generally philanthropic infrastructure and social projects (schools, churches, recreation parks, medical outreach clinics, household support) or in channeling post-disaster humanitarian aid. She cited the case in some parts of Africa where migrant organizations set up commissaries and purchase modern farming equipment for their hometowns.

OFW houses

Imperial noted that remittances in the Philippines were more likely to reach areas that are relatively untouched by government expenditures and official development assistance.

Far-flung barrios that have the amenities of basic utilities like electricity, telephone lines and good roads are most probably areas populated by OFW families, she said.

"The countryside is dotted with big, sometimes mansion-like houses and these are most likely houses of OFW families or retired *balikbayans* or *pensionados*."

Another downside, however, is that remittances may cause prices to rise in the area, Imperial warned.

She pointed to a town in Ilocos Sur where the prices in the public market can be higher than in Manila because the items go to the highest bidder among the *pensionados* from the US and seamen's families that abound in the town.

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Wednesday, January 3, 2007

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Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABC 5	Nickelodeon				PBA				Big News	PBA					Sentro	Frontlines		Araw-Araw Premyo Sa Resibo	Simbang Gabi
ABS-CBN 2	Kapamilya Cinema				Inocente Da Ti	Yu-Gi-Oh GX	Beet The Vandel Buster	Pangako Sa 'Yo	TV Patrol World		Kapamilya Deal Or No Deal	Super Inggo (8:15 PM)		Maging Sino Ka Man	Princess Hours		Bandila	Probe	Mirada De Mujer
AXN		Las Vegas (Season 2)		Kidnapped		The Amazing Race Asia		Ripley's Believe It or Not		The 4400 (Season 2)		Sports Disaster IV		World's Most Amazing Videos		CSI: Miami (Season 4)		CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (Season 6)	
bTV	TV Shopping	NBA Jam Local	NBA Action	EUROLeague				NBA: Suns @ Bulls					NBA Live	NBA Fantasy Hoops	NBA Knicks @ Kings				
Cinema One		Kailan Sasabihing Mahal Kita				Kontrobersyal				Campus Girls			Persona	Tinik Sa Dibdib (9:15 PM)				Babae Sa Bintana	
Cinemax			Catch-22				The Dukes Of Hazzard: Hazzard In Hollywood			Carlito's Way				Gridlock'd				Hellboy	
CNN		Business International		World News	World Sport	Larry King Live		Business International	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia	World News Asia	Your World Today			
Crime/Suspense		Bones		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Profiler		City Confidential		Law and Order		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24						Law Firm + Revelations	
Discovery Channel	Mean Machines	Zero Hour		American Chopper		Spear Of Jesus		Man Made Marvels		Wild Discovery		Hour China		Best of Discovery 2006		A Haunting		Asian Enigma	
Disney Channel	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	Totally Spies	Art Attack/Un-talkative Bunny	Mickey Mouseworks	Lilo & Stitch	Emperor's New School	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	That's So Raven	Wonderful World Of Disney			American Dragon	Kim Possible	Buzz On Maggie	Totally Spies	Wonderful World Of Disney	
ESPN		English Premier Football League				Cheerleading		Motorsport Asia	Atlantic Coast Conf.: Temple Vs Duke				In The Driver's Seat	Sportscenter Asia	Classic Boxing: Ali vs Foreman		Classic Boxing: R. Duran v Buchanan		Sportscenter Asia
ETC		America's Next Top Model 5		Change of Heart	Elimidate	Blind Date	Fifth Wheel	Seinfeld	Ambush Makeover	The Tyra Banks Show		Veronica Mars Season 2		Beauty And The Geek		Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	
ETC 2nd Avenue		Starting Over		The Maury Povich Show		The Jerry Springer Show		Dr. Phil		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition	The Ellen (Degeneres) Show		Wheel Of Fortune	Jeopardy	Cold Turkey 2		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition
Fox News		Hannity & Colmes		On The Record With Greta Van Susteren		The O'Reilly Factor		Your World With Neil Cavuto		Fox & Friends						Fox News Live			
GMA 7	Makita Ka Lang Muli	Kapuso Movie Festival				Ghost Fighter	Jewel In The Palace		24 Oras	Captain Barbell	Atlantika	StarStruck The Next Level	Bakekang	A Rosy Life (9:15 PM)		Nuts Entertainment			Saksi
Hallmark Channel		Missing		Place For Annie				McLeod's Daughters VI		Family Law III		ER I		Judging Amy VI		Scar Tissue			
HBO			Batman & Robin				Path Of Destruction			Junior				Daylight				Criminal	
Hero TV	Wild Cats	Sunny Pig	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Saiyuki Reload	Naruto	Monkey Turn	Gundam Seed Destiny	Full Metal Panic	Galaxy Angels	Voltes V Evolution	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Astroboy	Three-Eyed One	Naruto	Gosaurer	Wild Cats	Yu-Gi-Oh GX
IBC 13		EZ Shop				Home Shopping Network	IBC Express Balita	New Life Shopping Network		EBC Earth Files		Japan Video Topical Arts		Travel Philippines	Good Take	Up Close & Personal	IBC News Tonite		
JackTV		Raw				Cheat	Filter	Afterburn		Mad TV		That 70s Show	Arrested Development	Last Comic Standing		The Daily Show With Jon Stewart	Chappelle's Show	The Late Show David Letterman	
Lifestyle Network		30 Minute Meals	Sweet Dreams	Rachel Ray		Smart Solutions	DIY. Crafts	Food Network Special		Martha		Style Star	Fashion Police	Rachel Ray		Isaac		Fine Living Special	
MYX		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYXilog	MYX Firsts	Star MYX	OPM MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		MYX Live!		D'yan Banda	My MYX	MYX Backtrax	MYXilog
National Geographic	Monkey Business	Sounds From Disaster: Bali Bombing		Is It Real S2: Stigmata		Planet Wild S3		Top 5 - Animals Like Us: Medicine		National Geographic Specials		WOW! Wild Sex: Deviants (G1 & G2)		Seconds From Disaster: TWA Flight 800		Air Crash Investigation: Cutting Corners		Crash Scene Investigation: Greek Ferry Disaster	
NBN					Diyos Ko, Mahal Mo Ba Siya?	Teledyaryo W/ Rey Langit & Angelique Lazo		4th Cycling Search	The Final Say...ChaCha			Teledyaryo Final Edition		World Pool Championship					
Net 25	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	In Focus	Euromaxx	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Pagbubunyag		News Beat (Live)		OpenLine Live	Kapatid Sa Hanapbuhay	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Tamang Daan		World Report	In Focus	DWTV Journal News	Euromaxx
Nickelodeon	Chalkzone	The Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	Naturally Sadie	Romeo	SpongeBob SquarePants	My Life As A Teenage Robot	Danny Phantom	The Adventures Of Jimmy Neutron	The Fairly Odd Parents	Drake & Josh	Unfabulous	SpongeBob SquarePants	The Fairly Odd Parents	All That	Romeo	As Told By Ginger	My Dad The Rock Star	
PBO			Hello Love Goodbye Friend				Hacienda				She-Man (Mistress Of The Universe)				Mano-Mano				Isla
Qtv	Pawnshop No 8	Samurai X	Hikaru No Go	The Prince Of Tennis	MMS (My Music Station)		Moms		Winter Sonata	Irene	Emperor Of The Sea	Takeshi's Castle	Now Na!		News On Q	Balikbayan		Irene	Women Of Worth
RPN 9	TV Shopping	Real Lives, Real People		Roundtable Discussion	Mr. Fighting	RPN Arangkada Balita		Complete Savages	Jake In Progress	Iron Chef		Summerland		Extreme Makeover: Home Edition		Newswatch Now	Cage For Truth		Kerygma
SBN 21								Sony Music Video				Oras Ng Himala		Oras ng Katotohanan		Sony Music Video		Sony Music Video	
Solar Sports										Sagupaan	Bikini Destination	ECW		Undisputed		Sportsdesk			
Star Movies			The Sweetest Thing (3:20 PM)		Man On Fire (4:45 PM)						House Of D (7:20 PM)			Around The World In 80 Days				Taxi	
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful	General Hospital		Desire: Table For Three		Arrested Development	The Simpsons	Friends	Star News Asia	Seinfeld	Ed		Grey's Anatomy		Dinner: Table For Three		Seinfeld	Ed
Studio 23		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYXilog	Blog	Pinoy Dream Academy	Wazzup Wazzup	CSI	Las Vegas (8:15 PM)		It's A Guy Thing		News Central	Oprah (10:45PM)		MYXilog
UnTV				KNC Show	Kakampi Mo Ang Batas		Kaka at Claire Kasagpay Nyo		Public Hearing	Make My Day		Ang Dating Daan (8:15 PM)							

TV SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

ANTICORRUPTION SCORECARD

PAGC goal: 5 crooks a month

The PAGC SAID IT will also reward government agencies that get high marks in their "anti-corruption scorecard."

"We look forward to the coming year as a period of building further on PAGC's achievements in the past year, to really drive our message across that this government will leave no stone unturned to substantially reduce, if not to totally eradicate, corruption," said PAGC chair Constancia de Guzman in a press statement.

In its proposed "attack" plan for 2007, the PAGC aims to resolve at least two cases each week or 10 per month at most. In the case of high-profile cases, the agency said it was targeting at least 50 percent to carry punitive recommendations for endorsement to the Office of the President.

To meet its 2007 goals, the PAGC said the capacity of its investigators would be enhanced through additional training and through sharing of information and coordination in the conduct of surveillance with the Anti-Money Laundering Council, the National Bureau of Investigation and the Philippine National Police-CIDG.

"We want to ensure that corruption will indeed be a high-risk, low-reward activity," said De Guzman.

The PAGC plans to tap a P1 billion anticorruption fund from President Macapagal-Arroyo for its 2007 program. *Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.*

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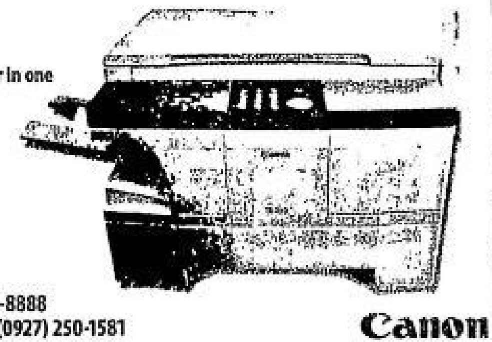

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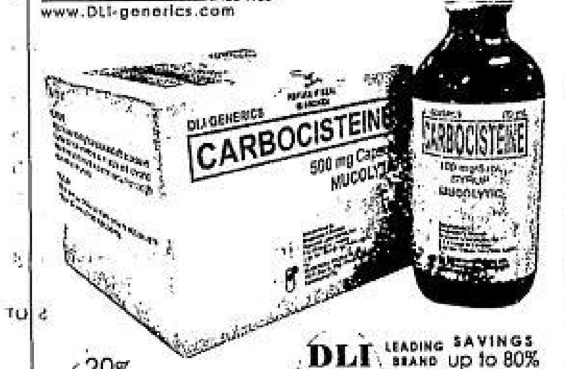

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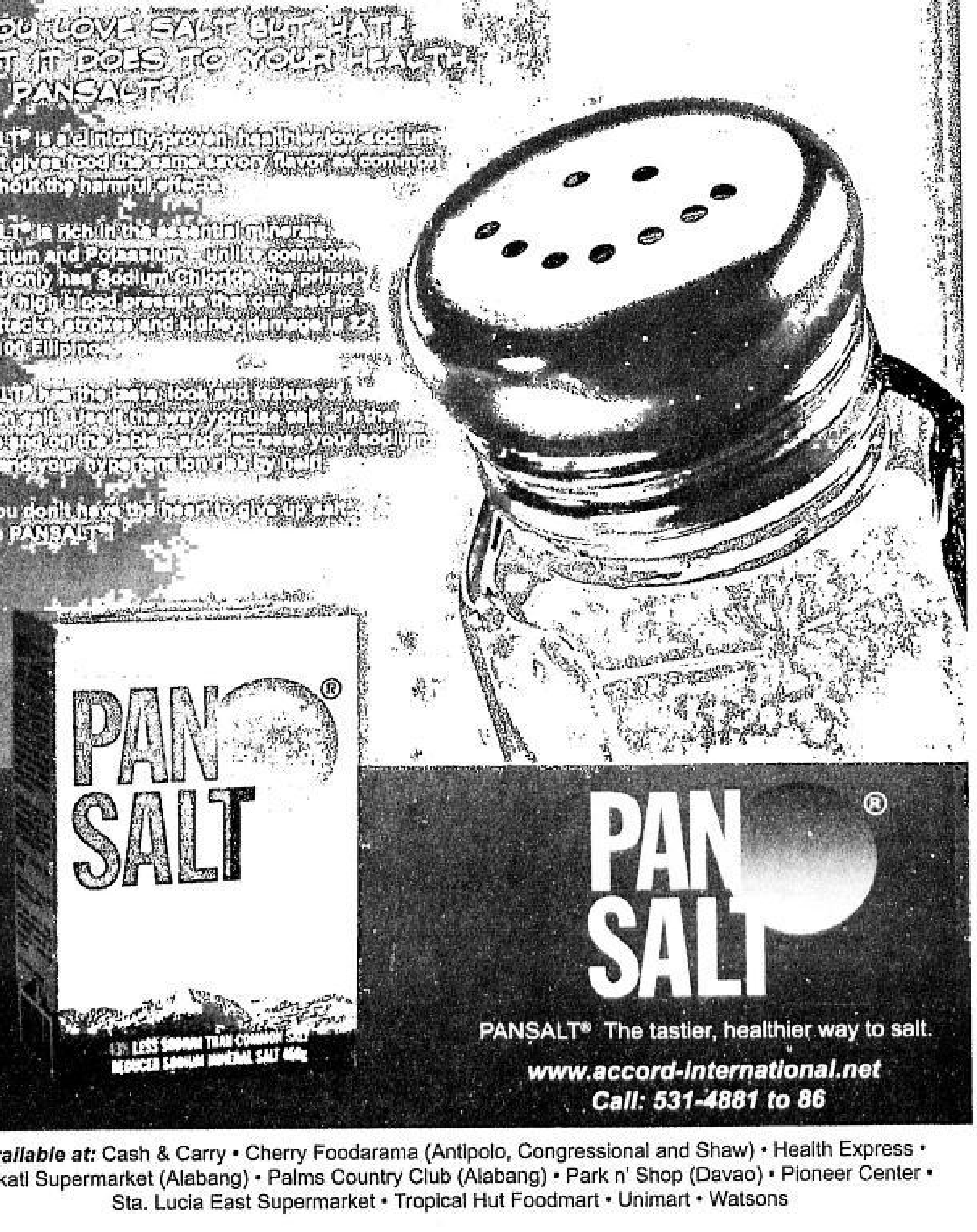

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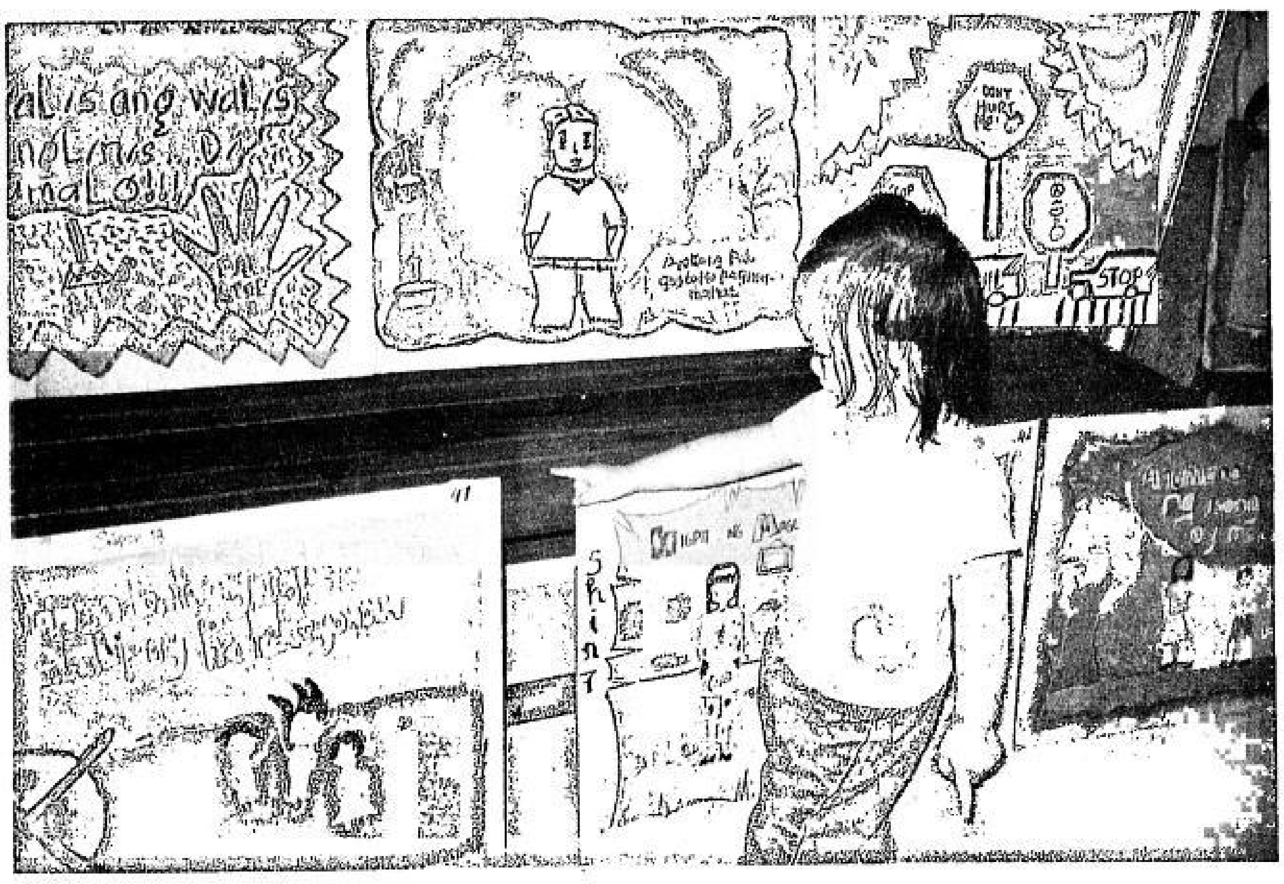


ART WORKSHOP is designed to encourage some 100 children mainly from the city's poor communities, to express their thoughts on their relationship with their parents and how the latter disciplines them. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Peso hits 6-year high;

From page A1

influence local demand.

But Dennis Arroyo, director for policy research at the National Economic and Development Authority, said personal consumption expenditure in the country would likely remain resilient at 5.3 percent this year despite the peso's sharp appreciation.

"It's true that a stronger peso will offset the consumption of OFW [families] at the micro level but the general trend at the macro level is that the [number of] OFWs [will further grow because it] is being driven by aging in the western world," he said.

Investor confidence

Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas attributed the peso's strong performance to the economy's solid fundamentals.

The declining inflation rate, improved fiscal performance and steady real growth have shored up investor confidence, which has helped support the peso, Tetangco said.

"With the continuation of these positive factors and the outlook for 2007 balance of payments (BOP) still at a surplus, the peso is expected to remain strong this year," he said.

The BSP expects the country to chalk up a balance of payment surplus of $1.6 billion this year, with strong inflows from OFWs expected to compensate for a possible decline in export earnings because of a projected US-led global economic slowdown.

The BOP measures the foreign exchange transactions between the domestic economy and the rest of the world. Any transaction, which gives rise to a payment by a Philippine resident, like importation or debt servicing, is a deficit item in the BOP. Any transaction that gives rise to a receipt, like borrowing, OFW remittance, is a su

The BSP has taken ac strong dollar inflows las ahead of maturity abo worth of foreign debts. government and other p vate companies have fo

Tetangco said extern the rise or fall of the US also continue to influe movement.

US dollar to furthe

The US dollar is exp analysts to weaken f major currencies this y expected cut in interes Federal Reserve, the US to perk up sluggish world's biggest econom

At the Philippine D yesterday, thin corpora the greenback also all

Spare the rod; spoil your kids with love

From page A1

the government and other civil society organizations to help put an end to the corporal punishment of children.

SCS country manager Rowena D. Cordero said during the Forum on Initiatives to End the Physical and Emotional Punishment of Children last November that corporal punishment threatened the long-term emotional and physical development of children.

85 percent

Corporal punishment is defined as an adult use of force to inflict physical and emotional pain or suffering on a child.

This is often done after a perceived act of disrespect for or disobedience to parents or to people in charge of a child's care.

An SCS study in identified barangays in Cebu and in Metro Manila last year showed that 85 percent of over 100 children interviewed said they received physical punishment in their homes.

More positive ways

As much as 82 percent reported experiencing direct assault on different parts of the body, with spanking as the most common (65 percent).

About 70 percent said they felt hurt or pain after being punished, and 77 percent said they wanted their parents to use more positive ways of disciplining them.

"Children have rights. They should be treated with respect and dignity. Let us listen to what they have to say," Cordero said.

And they have a lot to say.

Children's yearnings

When asked about their views on corporal punishment, children covered by the survey said:

- "Be good role models so that we can learn from you."
- "Don't vent your frustration and anger on us."
- "As children, we know about the realities of our lives. We have good ideas that can help. Please make it easy for us to share these with you."

Common among Asians

Dominique Pierre Plateau, regional advisor of Save the Children Sweden, yesterday said that corporal punishment was common in Asia, affecting children from all levels of society, regardless of culture and religion.

Plateau shared data the SCS collected from more than 3,000 children and over 1,000 adults that show that sometimes brutal punishment are meted out on children in the name of their "best interests."

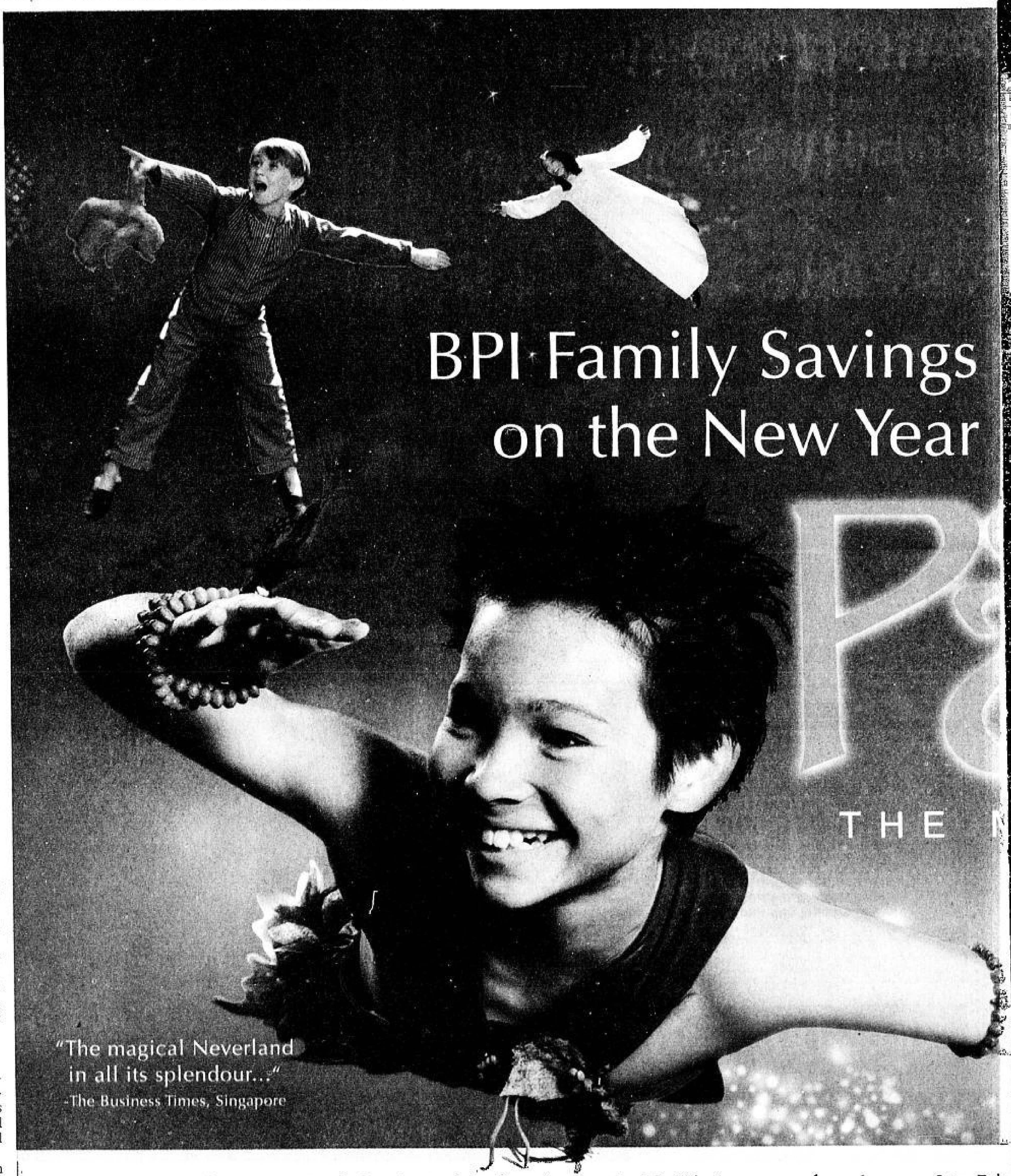
An SCS research by Save the Children in Southeast Asia and the Pacific shows that hair-pulling, ear-twisting, pinching, smacking, beating and verbal assaults are common methods of punishment—plus some cases of kicking and punching.

Loving arms

Among the most extreme examples of punishment mentioned in the research are electric shocks and being tied near ants' nest (Vietnam); starving and standing while holding a chair (Korea); pushups and walking on knees until they bleed (Indonesia), and twisting of joints and running attached to a moving bicycle (Cambodia).

While the known methods of punishment in the Philippines are less severe compared to those reported in other countries in Asia, the one thing all the children want is for all forms of punishment to end, no matter how "mild" the form is.

As one child put it, she hopes that the arms that swing at her when she misbehaves will be the same arms that will enfold her in a big, tight and loving hug.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A MONEY changer in Makati City counts money as the peso reaches its highest level in six years. REUTERS

to easily breach the 49:$1 barrier. The turnover at the spot foreign exchange market was $373.4 million.

"During the long weekends, OFW remittances really poured in," said Roland Avante, treasurer at Chinatrust Commercial Bank. "It's also the season when everyone's on a holiday mood and there's not much demand for dollars."

Across the globe, Avante said the markets were closely watching the movement of US interest rates, as this would have a significant influence on investor appetite for emerging markets, like the Philippines.

When interest rates in the United States are deemed too low, investors tend to scout for higher-yielding investments in developing countries.

Jonathan Ravelas, chief strategist at Banco de Oro Universal Bank, said the peso would further benefit from a potential 50-basis point cut by the US Federal Reserve this year, beginning with a quarter-percentage reduction as early as the second quarter.

After yesterday's rally past the 49:$1 barrier, Ravelas said the peso would likely trade between 48.90 and 40.95 to the dollar today.

Correction

Marcelo Ayes, senior vice president at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., said the sentiment was still generally favorable for the peso, which could further strengthen to the 46.50 level by year's end.

"Normally, holiday remittances last only up to the first week of January," Ayes said.

"But on the other hand, commercial demand is not there and portfolio inflows into the stock market could be the driver. But we need a healthy correction," he said.

Marcelo said that after the first few days of the year, the foreign exchange market would usually correct in favor of the US dollar, then resume the uptrend after the Chinese New Year in February.

Development Bank of Singapore had predicted that the peso would break into the 48-level against the US dollar early this year and further rise to 47 in the second semester despite market jitters over the May elections or possible BSP rate cuts.

"We like the peso but expect volatility with the May 2007 elections," DBS said in its recommendation for the first quarter of 2007.

"Appreciation will rely more on inflows, with the central bank cutting rates in 2007," it said.

Any monetary easing, which results in lower yields on peso-denominated assets, usually makes the currency less attractive to investors.

DBS expects the BSP to cut its key policy rates twice next year—by 25 basis points in the first quarter and again in the second quarter of 2007, bringing down the overnight borrowing rate to 7 percent from the current 7.5 percent.

A REPRESENTATIVE from the inspection team pores over some of the books at a warehouse in Parañaque City on Tuesday. RAFFY LERMA

12M textbooks out of storage, set for distribution

From page A1

hundred copies—which were found to have weak bindings and scratched back covers.

"It has to withstand rain and sun, and rough handling by children," said engineer Ben Caburnay, a field officer of the DepEd's Instruction Materials Council secretariat.

Caburnay said the books should have a "life span" of at least five years.

One book per pupil

To ensure a one-book-one-pupil ratio, as well as a continuous replacement, some 120,000 copies of the textbooks will be kept at the DepEd as a "contingency" reserve.

Anticorruption watchdog G-Watch coordinator Redempto S. Parafina said that barring any hitches, the textbooks would be delivered to the provinces in November.

There, the books will undergo another round of quality inspection by local DepEd officials and volunteer nongovernment organizations.

Supreme Court steps in

"If 10 percent is found defective, the contract can be rescinded," Parafina said.

The delivery was initially scheduled last Nov. 13 to Dec. 22. But this was cancelled after a losing bidder sought—and was granted—an injunction from a lower court on the ground that the two winning bidders were involved in a "conflict of interest."

However, the Supreme Court threw out last Dec. 20 the injunction, paving the way for the full implementation of the P800-million government contract with three firms to supply 12 million textbooks.

The textbook is authored by Expectacion Castor-Gonzales.

$200-M loan

Last year, the World Bank granted the Philippines a $200-million loan to address the problem of the declining quality of public education.

The money was earmarked for textbooks on Social Studies, English, Mathematics and Science, and to improve teaching standards.

The books were supplied by Vibal Publishing House, Watana Phanit Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd and the Daewoo International Supply Corp.

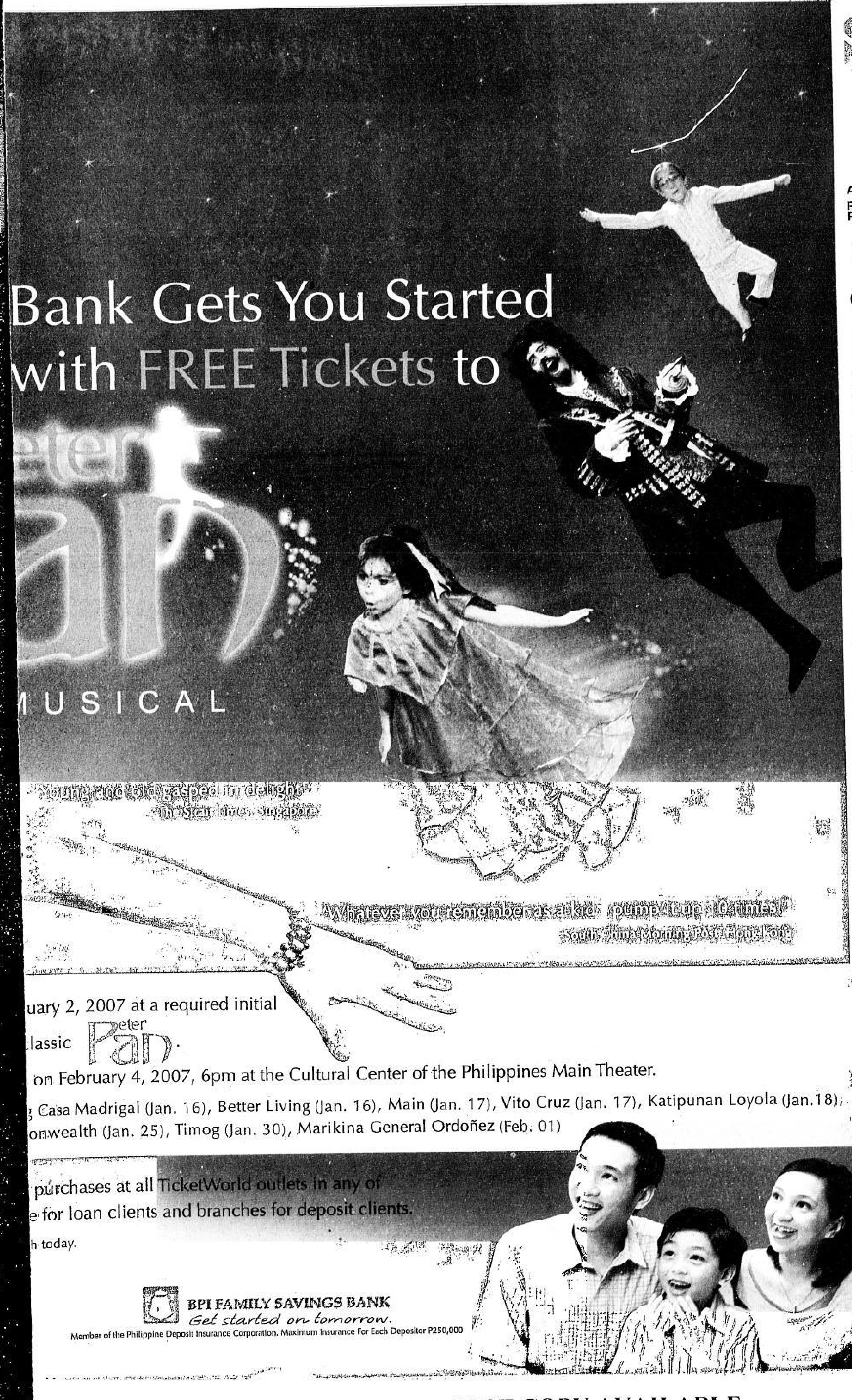
Vibal is a Filipino company while Watana and Daewoo are Thai and Korean firms, respectively.

More books in the pipeline

According to Caburnay, the books underwent a four-level content evaluation by experts on the subject.

He said the social studies textbooks for Grade 6 pupils and high school students were still under evaluation prior to printing.

G-Watch has been monitoring the procurement and delivery of textbooks at the DepEd since 2003.



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The end

EDITORIAL

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S VOICE WAS DROWNED OUT by the voices of his killers. "Go to hell!" they told him. An official was reduced to pleading, "Please no! The man is about to die," but the chanting and the catcalls, continued.

Among the former Iraqi dictator's last audible words were "gallows of shame." He was still speaking when the trapdoor opened and he fell through, the noose breaking his neck almost instantly.

"The tyrant has fallen! May God curse him!" crowed his executioners. Within hours, Hussein's final moments, captured by camera phones, were being circulated and seen around the world.

Writing in the conservative National Review's symposium on the morality of Hussein's execution, Michael Pakaluk, a professor of philosophy, pointed out three situations in which such an execution would be justified: "First, when the criminal's continued life in prison would serve as an incitement to others to commit crimes; second, when society is so unstable, that there is no guarantee that a criminal condemned to life in prison would indeed remain there until his death; and third, when the criminal is not simply guilty of an offense against a particular person, or a particular society, but also has committed crimes 'against humanity.'" The justification for Hussein's execution has been the subject of as much debate as the circumstances that surrounded his final moments.

Among the first to react were Muslims the world over. Rizkar Mohammed Amin, who had presided over an earlier trial of Hussein for crimes against humanity, said the execution was illegal. Hussein was hanged during Eid Al-Adha, the Muslim festival of the sacrifice which marks the end of the annual Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca, and one of the two great festivals of that faith. Based on religious and secular law, then, the execution has faced criticism from many Muslims.

The Vatican called the execution a "tragedy." The European Union basically described it as barbaric. American officials let it be known that they attempted to delay the execution.

Indeed, there was something peculiar about the investigations launched by the Iraqi government into the manner by which Hussein was executed. Onlookers with cell phone cameras chanting the name of Moktada Al-Sadr, Iraqi commentators observed, made Hussein's hanging look more like a lynching than the end of an inexorable, and unquestionable, legal process. The execution, then, even as it looked to crimes of the past, has become firmly embedded in the ongoing civil war in Iraq.

He was hanged essentially for crimes against the majority group of Shiite Muslims in Iraq but not for his crimes against ethnic minorities such as the Kurds which were still being tried. He died to expiate the execution of 148 Shiites after he survived an assassination attempt in the 1980s. But what of the others, the tens of thousands of his countrymen from his own Sunni branch of Islam, or the ethnicities he suppressed? What of the hundreds of thousands of Iranians who died as a consequence of his plotting, and waging, aggressive war, a crime for which the Nazi leadership was sent to the gallows? Did the hangman cheat them of justice?

And yet it cannot be denied that there is a large body of international opinion that, while regretting the mob-like atmosphere that surrounded Hussein's hanging, approves wholeheartedly of the execution itself. The ex-dictator did not die disgraced, but free of the clutches of accountability, as the Chile's former strongman Augusto Pinochet did just a few weeks ago or our own Ferdinand Marcos a decade and a half ago.

The world should not be a place where tyrants can look forward to dying peacefully in their beds after a lifetime of plunder and political killings. The only questions should be whether such a tyrant will die at the hands of an angry mob—as Italy's Benito Mussolini and Romania's—Nicolae Ceausescu did—or at the terminal end of a hangman's noose after a tribunal's judgment, as happened to the Nazi leadership, or in the obscurity of a lonely jail cell while serving a life sentence, as Yugoslavia's—Slobodan Milosevic did. But if there is any consensus that has emerged in the wake of Hussein's death, it is that state criminals must pay, for it is a far worse crime to leave them be.

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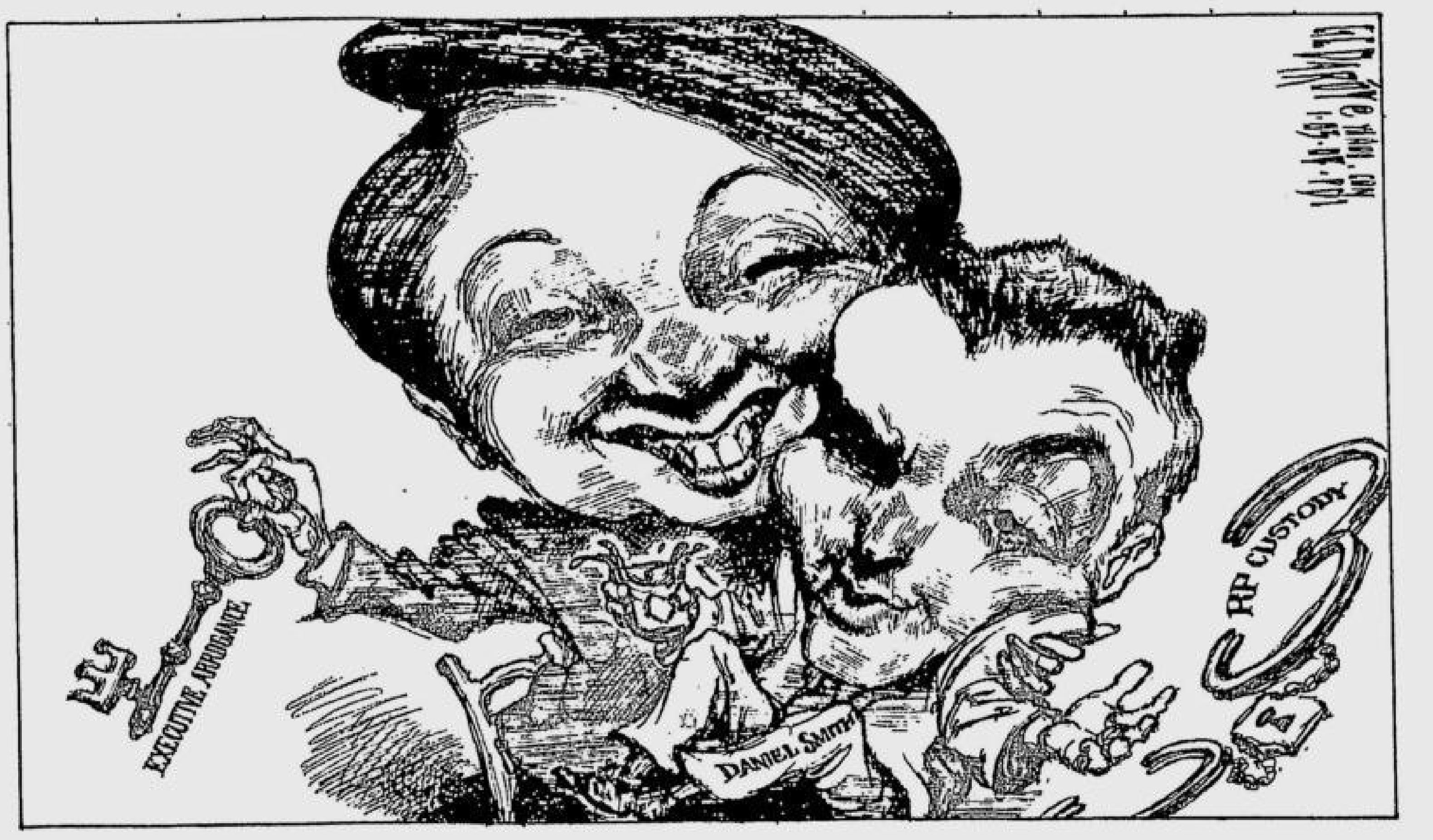


'What are we in power for?'

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

YOU HAVE SEEN MANY ESCAPE MOVIES, with cloak-and-dagger stuff and villains or heroes (depending on which side you are on) helping the prisoner escape. Well, the escape of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith from the Makati City Jail belongs to the same class with no less than two presidents involved in it. I dreamed about it last night, and this is what happened:

President George W. Bush woke up on the wrong side of the bed early one morning and summoned his generals to the White House.

"What is this about a Marine clamped in jail in a Third World country called the Philippines? A congressman kept me awake all night complaining that one of his constituents has been jailed there and we couldn't get him out. What are you doing?" he demanded from his assembled generals.

"That's Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, sir," one of the generals replied. "He has been tried and convicted by a Philippine court of raping a Filipina."

"That's not the first time an American GI has raped a woman in a conquered territory, and so far no one has been jailed," Bush said. "How is this one different?"

"He admitted having sex with her, sir."

"That's not necessarily rape," Bush interrupted. "She may have seduced him. I understand this Smith is quite a good-looking GI. Women from Third World countries like to have children by Americans. They become their movie stars and beauty queens."

"The judge ruled it was rape."

"Can't we make this judge change his mind? Give him a tourist visa—make it an immigrant visa. Give him a green card. I understand many Filipinos will do anything for a green card."

"Not this judge, Mr. President. He's a pretty stubborn guy, not at all interested in going to the US. We don't understand it at all."

"Well then how about some gunboat diplomacy? Send an aircraft carrier to the Philippines. No send two—make it three. That should send those Filipinos scurrying for cover."

"We can't do that sir. The Philippines is an ally."

"Why not if I say so? We invaded Iraq, we invaded Vietnam, we invaded Korea, we sent our troops to so many other countries, why not the Philippines? It doesn't have even one battleship or warplanes that fly or even a half-dozen tanks. What are you afraid of?"

"Sir," ventured a general, "we lost the war in Korea and Vietnam and we're losing it in Iraq."

"Is that so? After spending all those billions of dollars?"

"Yes sir."

"We are the mightiest nation in the world," President Bush exclaimed. "We have the strongest armies. We have atomic bombs and nuclear missiles, how come these small pipsqueak nations are making fools of us?"

"We don't understand it. They love us when they are asking us for aid and loans."

"Isn't the Philippines asking us for any more loans?"

"It's always asking for loans. And for many other things besides."

"Well, don't give them anything until they turn over Smith to the US Embassy. Better still, call all those loans, and suspend all aid. I understand two typhoons just hit the Philippines. Don't send them any aid. They didn't send us any aid when Katrina hit New Orleans."

"Mr. President," the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff raised his hand. "Maybe it would be better if you call President Macapagal-Arroyo."

"That little woman who claims to be the classmate of Bill Clinton at Georgetown?"

"Yes sir."

"All right, call that Macapagal woman."

In Malacañang, President Macapagal-Arroyo was having a Cabinet meeting precisely on the Smith case.

"What's holding up the transfer of Smith to the US Embassy? *Nagkasundo na si* Bert Romulo *at* US ambassador," the President asked.

"The judge refuses to recognize the agreement. He said it should be you who should sign it."

"*Ayoko nga.* We should make it appear that I have no participation in such an unpopular move. *'Di ba inappeal natin ang* decision *niya sa* Court of Appeals?"

"The Court of Appeals rejected our appeal."

"Take it up to the Supreme Court."

"Our legal advisers believe the tribunal will turn it down, too. The facts are pretty clear: the trial is over and Smith has been convicted and sentenced. The US has no more jurisdiction over him."

"Well then, let's stand by the rule of law and uphold the sovereignty of the Philippines. Smith stays in a Philippine jail, period."

Just then the telephone rang.

"Ma'am," the secretary said, "it is President Bush calling from the White House."

"What? Who? President Bush?" GMA turned pale. "Meeting adjourned. All of you get out of here." With trembling hand, she put the telephone to her ear.

"Good evening, Mr. President. Happy New Year!"

"Quit the crap. Why is my soldier still in your stinking jail?"

"We can't release him without a court order."

"Why not if you say so? You're the president, aren't you? What are you in power for?"

"I can't do that. I can't disobey the court. I will be impeached if I did."

"Being impeached means you would be removed from office, right?" Bush said from the White House.

"That's right, Mr. President."

"But there are other ways to remove you from office besides impeachment, right? Like a coup, for instance…"

"You can't do that…."

"Why not? We just hanged Saddam Hussein. If we can hang one dictator, we can hang another."

"Mr. President," GMA said, "I just got an idea. We can transfer Smith in the dead of night. We will say it is to avoid traffic."

"That's my girl!"

"Don't worry, Mr. President. What are we in power for?"

Man in the mirror

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

LAST FRIDAY WAS A SAD DAY, A BAD DAY, a black day, for America. While this country's attention was turned to other things, Filipinos looking forward to things getting better, it did a despicable thing, reminding us that things could always be worse.

That despicable thing was spiriting away Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith in the dead of night, while most Filipinos were busy preparing for the light of New Year's Day with ample fortifications of spirits. It was done with the express approval of the Philippine government (GMA's and Raul Gonzalez's visages loom large in the mind's eye) by the avowal of the US Embassy itself. "Yes," Matthew Lussenhop, the embassy spokesman confirmed. "He was transferred from the Makati jail to US custody consistent with the Visiting Forces Agreement that is binding on the Philippines and the United States."

That has been a bone of contention for some time. Gonzalez, the official justice secretary and unofficial lawyer of Smith, has been arguing that the VFA calls for any US personnel convicted of a crime in the Philippines to be turned over to the Americans. Benjamin Pozon, the judge who found Smith guilty of rape, argues that the VFA says otherwise. I will not join their argument, except to say that between Gonzalez and Pozon, I have no problem whom to believe. I'll believe my neighbor's dog before I believe Gonzalez. Never mind his disease, his mental condition was like that long before he got afflicted by it. That was the precise reason GMA appointed him justice secretary. It isn't just great minds that work along parallel lines, petty ones do, too.

My point is simply this: You grant that the VFA allows for convicted American servicemen to be rescued from the tender mercies of Filipino wardens, that still doesn't make this right, it only makes the VFA very, very wrong. Which was what the teeth-gnashing protesters of that iniquity were already shouting way back then: The VFA would bring back all the evils that the bases agreement and all our other military agreements with the US had wrought upon us. It wasn't a bilateral agreement, it was a perverse arrangement between a sadist and a masochist. No, more than that, it was a transaction between a whore without money and moral scruple and a customer with the first but not the second, which was probably what Smith and his fellows took their encounter with "Nicole" to be.

To appreciate the depth of the injustice of plucking Smith from the Makati jail, imagine a Filipino cop or soldier convicted of rape in Texas or even Alaska being plucked out of a Texas or Alaskan correctional by the Philippine government. Smith had more than good chances in Pozon's court, given that this country's unbelievably named justice secretary was serving as his chief counsel. I don't know that a Filipino accused of the crime Smith committed, particularly given its circumstances, would have managed to get to court in Mississippi. Indeed, I don't know that his companions at the time he savagely raped an American woman would have managed to escape justice, or retribution, or lynching, whichever comes first.

One can argue, of course, that we can't do that because we have no treaty with America that allows us to do that. Precisely. That only draws attention to the atrocity that is the treaty itself. We have no treaty with America that allows us to do that because no such treaty will ever pass in America. The notion that a convicted Filipino rapist, serviceman or not, would have to be delivered to us instead of being made to rot in an American jail along with his offending organ would be anathema to Americans, not to speak of the victims.

Nicole has a right to fume, "*Bastusan na.*" The people who populate this government are perfectly capable of *bastusan*. Their very existence is an affront to decency: They have no right to be there. But the *bastusan* in Nicole's case began long before Smith was sprung from jail. It began the day this country's government sprang the VFA on its citizens.

The VFA allows convicted American rapists to be sprung from Filipino jails? Then scrap the VFA. It should never have been there.

Completely ironically, on the day that it happened, a letter appeared in the Letters section of the INQUIRER giving this country a good perspective from which to view Smith's case. It was written by an American, Lloyd Monk, and went in part:

"I hope the Philippine government will not give in to the request/demand of turning Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith over to US custody. He committed a crime and should be made to pay-whether this incident happened in Manila or New York. … Even those who just stood by and let it happen, they too should be made accountable….

"For this group of US officials (that is exactly what they are, representatives of the American people) to gang-rape a woman in this country is appalling to me and to anyone else who holds our American heritage dear.

"I am close to 50 years old, the son of a career soldier and this is the first time I felt this much shame as an American."

It is a decent sentiment written by a decent person who understands that friendship, which is what the VFA means to signify, is premised on decency. There can be no friendship without equality and respect. A relationship without equality and respect is not friendship, it is vassalage. Turning a convicted rapist over to the Americans is not friendship, it is stupidity. It is also a horrible injustice to the Filipino citizens in general and "Nicole" in particular.

And the Americans wonder why they're losing the war against terror? They don't really need to equip themselves with high-powered telescopes with night vision to spot the enemy. All they need to do is look at a mirror.

The 'Three Kings' and the Philippines

COMMENTARY

John J. Carroll, S.J.
Institute on Church and Social Issues

THE "THREE KINGS" DEAR TO CHRISTIAN ART are not in fact described in the Gospel as kings, but as "wise men." Scholars suggest that they were astrologers, who studied the heavens in an attempt to understand and predict what was taking place on earth. If this is so, then God was leading them by means of the "science" of the time to the Mystery which is beyond all science, the Mystery of His Son becoming man.

The wise men came looking for a king, and yet were directed to the son of poor peasant parents, a child born, according to St. Luke's Gospel, in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn." Yet, "falling on their knees, they did him homage." One can see here a tremendous act of faith as they set aside their expectations and opened themselves to the Mystery.

Today science goes far beyond that of the astrologers. When we stop to think of it, we are overwhelmed by the immensity of the universe; the light which strikes our eye as we look at the heavens tonight may have been emitted by a star thousand of years ago and have been traveling at the speed of light for all of that time. We are told that it all began somehow with a "Big Bang" some 10 billion years ago; that our Sun and Earth have been taking shape all of this time, the Earth eventually bringing forth algae and plants and other living things and finally intelligent human beings.

Here human intelligence faces questions: Why all of this? Where did it come from? What gave to matter or energy or whatever be the fundamental building block the potential for developing the human brain which can scan and measure the known universe? What does it all mean?

The answer for the Christian lies where it lay for the wise men, in the Child born in Bethlehem. There is a tremendous mystery here, which we tend to obscure by our "sweet baby Jesus" sentimentality. The great paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin saw the whole history of the universe and the evolution of the human species as culminating in that Child; and one of my favorite Christmas hymns, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," puts it more succinctly "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

We know nothing of how the meeting with the Child affected the later life of the wise men, only that they "returned to their own country by a different way." Perhaps this can be taken as an indication that the meeting with this Child should change our lives.

Here in the Philippines, we have been hearing much about "Charter change" as a solution to the nation's political problems. I have long been pointing out what I see as a great need for structural change, to change the systems which are biased against the poor and make development difficult. I think here of the land-owning system, the tax system, the system of justice, the pork barrel and scandalously expensive elections, among others. These are what Pope John Paul II called "structures of sin"; he insisted that these have been created by the actions—often self-centered and sinful—of human beings and that they are sustained by the unwillingness—often also self-centered and sinful—of men and women to change them.

Here our concern for structural change meets the need for personal conversion, and we see the difficulty, if not the futility, of trying to change one without the other. For in fact, the 1987 Constitution has a whole series of provisions intended to redress the imbalances in Philippine society: agrarian reform and urban housing reform, the rights of workers and minorities, the right of all citizens to a decent education, to name but a few. Yet progress in these areas has been excruciatingly slow if it can be observed at all, and in many cases—agrarian reform, for example—this has been due to the self-centered resistance of those who benefited from the structures of sin.

Hence the need for personal change, and as a recent editorial in the INQUIRER pointed out, both Jose Rizal and the Philippine bishops have emphasized the need for character change—and not only among the nation's lawmakers but among the people themselves, those who elect the lawmakers. In its absence, any change, even constitutional change, will only see many of the same people ruling for their own advantage and perhaps with even more power than at present.

In this context, Fr. Antonio F. Moreno, S.J., in his book "Church, State and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines," offers some insights which may be useful. Based on the recent histories of the dioceses of Malaybalay and Bacolod, his work shows how a local church in which the pastors and the organized faithful share a common vision, and which reaches out to other organized groups, can have a social impact—on logging in Bukidnon and on peace efforts in Negros—reaching also to the national level. It is in groups such as these that values are brought to the surface and articulated, negotiated and developed into programs. And groups such as these are the building blocks of a truly democratic society.

It will be a long process, but perhaps it is time to cease expecting a messiah to solve the nation's problems at a single stroke. And the journey of the wise men "from the east" was not just an afternoon stroll. The question is whether the Filipino people have the faith of the wise men, their hope and their persistence.

A bad actor

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECRETARY RONALDO Puno may have thought he had crafted the perfect explanation for his "midnight express" extraction of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith from the Makati City Jail, reasoning that he was just following the "wishes" of Judge Benjamin Pozon, who had convicted Smith for the rape of complainant "Nicole."

But Puno has to take acting lessons first before he tries to pull off his bald lies and deception. All throughout his press conference yesterday, Puno had a smile playing around the edges of his lips, leading viewers to think that he was secretly amused either by the story he was peddling or that the media were seemingly buying it. Watching the footage, I wanted to reach into the TV set and wipe the smirk off his face.

I can only agree with Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. that the transfer of Smith could become a "flash point," raising once more questions about President Macapagal-Arroyo's legitimacy, if not her patriotism and loyalty to the Constitution. Despite efforts to keep her distance, it's inevitable that the blame will fall squarely on her lap. The crux of the matter is that handing over Smith to the Americans has been the administration's wish from the very beginning, and that it was GMA's alter egos in the Cabinet—the secretaries of justice, foreign affairs and interior and local government—who carried out this wish, clearly on her orders, with her approval and at her behest.

* * *

PUNO was firm in his declaration that they will make sure that Smith will not leave the country, and that is why he has formed a committee to conduct regular monitoring of Smith and the conditions of his incarceration in the US Embassy.

But the truth of the matter is that, for all intents and purposes, Smith has already left the Philippines since the embassy compound, as the secretary himself admitted, is "US territory."

On questioning by the media, Puno admitted that he couldn't even station guards or security personnel paid for by the Philippine government outside Smith's detention quarters because they would be violating American sovereignty. And even if "technically" the Philippine government could conduct an inspection at the embassy at anytime of the day, he admitted that they will have to coordinate with the Americans.

If they received word that Smith was being spirited out of the country, could Philippine police be allowed into Embassy premises? What if security forces under US command stopped the police in their tracks? Is there anything Philippine authorities could do, short of storming the embassy and violating diplomatic rules?

Given the general arrogance with which Americans here have trifled with our laws and officials, it's not so farfetched, either, that they would clandestinely fly Smith out of the country and to their air base in Okinawa, as they did with Smith's co-accused. What do we do then? Do we have the political will and the power to send troops to Okinawa or even to the mainland to re-arrest Smith?

If, even while Smith was already under Philippine custody, Arroyo officials were already shaking in their boots when the US threatened to cancel military exercises, what makes us think they would summon the requisite patriotism to run after Smith should he be flown out of the country? I bet our officials would only be too happy to see Smith go, justice and the rule of law be damned.

* * *

THAT was a great feature in yesterday's issue, with photos of presidential families during the holidays.

I was especially pleased with the photo of former President Cory Aquino and all of her children, in-laws and grandchildren. Most astounding of all was seeing how much her grandsons have grown, obviously no longer the tots and babies we used to see all the time during their Lola's incumbency, as well as seeing basketball player James Yap firmly ensconced in the bosom of the family, beside a visibly pregnant Kris.

President Joseph Estrada was represented by a touching photo of him bending solicitously over his mother Doña Mary, with Sen. Loi Ejercito hovering in the background. But I couldn't keep a naughty thought from popping up, wondering what a real family shoot would have been like for the Ejercito-Estrada clan, what with, uhhm, Erap's many families and offspring.

Instead of their personal family, President Fidel V. Ramos and wife Ming posed with the staff of FVR's foundation, all of them with their thumbs up, the signature gesture that FVR popularized during his term.

* * *

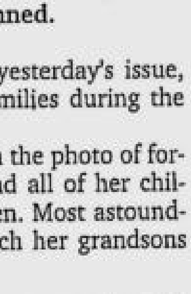
OF course, getting top billing was the family photo of President GMA and her family, which they used in the Christmas card they sent to friends, supporters and the media. They indeed made a pleasing sight, the granddaughters presenting living proof that the Macapagal-Arroyo genes produce really attractive progeny.

I must say the Arroyo administration's Christmas presents have been a distinct step up from the gifts usually sent by her predecessors. The first one, I remember, was a set of plates bearing botanical prints of Philippine fruits, contained in a distinctive, attractive box. The next Christmas, Malacañang gifted friends with a gorgeous aromatic box containing a selection of native herbal teas. This was followed by a pair of cups bearing prints of Philippine scenery and packets of native coffee.

This year, the gift box was just as distinctive but smaller. It contained a pair of votive candles in glasses marked by the seal of the President. Friends teased me that either Malacañang's gift budget had contracted, or I had fallen in the President's list of priorities. I would rather think it was her way of lighting a candle instead of cursing the darkness of harsh criticism.

Domestic life a century ago

LOOKING BACK



Ambeth R. Ocampo

WHILE EVERYONE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO 2007 and what the Year of the Pig will bring, I find myself looking backward, trying to find something relevant.

My students have gone to the microfilm section of the library and located the newspapers that saw light on the day they were born. They wrote about what they found, and in some way practiced the historian's craft by writing their essays and moving backward and forward between time zones. Then they went to the National and Metropolitan Museums to see traces of the precolonial past. Here they tried to piece together a world that is lost to many of us because this is the gray area that tests the limits of history—it is a time before written or recorded history. I remind them that when they use the term "prehistoric," they do not have to imagine too far the past to the age of dinosaurs and cavemen. Just going back to the 9th century is challenging enough.

When they return to class this week, they will have gone to Intramuros. If they followed the instructions in their syllabus, they would have walked on the walls of Intramuros, explored San Agustin Church and imagined life in the late 19th-century Philippines by visiting Casa Manila, across the street from San Agustin. The exercise is not just physical, with lots of walking, but rather one that engages the imagination.

When you look at the Muni (that's short for Municipal) Golf Course from the walls by Bastion de San Diego and let your gaze go further to Bonifacio Drive, Rizal Park, the Manila Hotel and Manila Bay, can you imagine Rizal's last walk that is re-enacted each year on Dec. 30?

I often ask my students if they can live in an age without cell phones, i-Pods, DVD players, aircon, malls and the Internet. Naturally, the answer is almost always a resounding no.

The most talked about feature of the Casa Manila museum is the toilet. Students are not shocked that it is just a seat with a hole and no flush facility, but rather that there is one seat in the room with two holes, meaning you could even play chess or checkers there while waiting. Any trip to the past is meant to provide perspective, but more importantly an appreciation for many of the blessings of modern life we take for granted.

Over the holidays, I went through my shelves, weeding out books that I think I may never find the time, not interest, to read in the next 20 years. These books cover a range of titles from "Cockfighting Rules" to a technical report on cassava growing in Bukidnon. While I'm attracted to obscure titles like the biography of the first Filipino blessed (afflicted?) with the stigmata, I don't know why I have a copy of the Service Manual of the Bureau of Education for 1917 or the 1949 Manila telephone directory. But then I always find something new in something old that will be interesting for readers of this column.

One of the obscure books that turned up during my spring cleaning was "An Ohio Woman in the Philippines" by Emily Bronson Conger. Originally published in 1904, this little book, with two lizards gold-stamped on the elegant blue cloth cover, made me realize that many foreign women at the turn of the last century wrote books about their visit to the Philippines. While their concerns may not have been the same as their husbands, who dealt with politics or the military, they provided an insight into domestic life a century ago. Conger wrote about her stay in Iloilo, and her description of making a home there is quite interesting:

"The houses are made of bamboo; some of them are pretty, quite artistic; the plain ones cost about 75 cents each; no furniture of any kind is needed. The native food is rice, or, as it is called in the vernacular *Sow-sow*. It is cooked in an earthen pot set upon stones with a few lighted twigs thrust under it for fire. When it is eaten with nature's forks—the fingers—with a relish of raw fish, it is the chief article of diet.

"House cleaning is one thing that I never saw in practice or evidence. I took a supply of lye with me and it was a huge joke to see the natives use it in cleaning the floors. The windows are made of oyster shells which are thin and flat; these, cut in three-inch squares, make a window particularly adapted to withstand the heavy storms and earthquakes; it transmits a pleasant opalescent light. Coffee is raised, but not widely used by the natives; they prefer chocolate.

"After many unsuccessful attempts, I gave up trying to have my dishes washed in my way; I soon discovered that the servants used the tea towels on their bodies. This convinced me, and I let them wash mine as they did their own, by pouring water on each dish separately, rinsing and setting dry on the porch in the sun, the only place where the vermin would not crawl over them.

"The irons used for pressing clothes are like a smooth, round-bottomed skillet, the inside filled with lighted sticks and embers. The operator, who sits on the floor, passes this smoking mass over the thing to be pressed. The article, when finished, looks as if it had been sat upon."

In four simple paragraphs, you see life in a century past. Houses cost more than 75 cents these days, but reading on makes me bless the heavens for life in the 21st century, life in 2007 and all the surprises it brings.

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Shining lights

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

MANY OF THE NEW YEAR GREETINGS I GOT THIS YEAR, through e-mail and text, were striking in the way they expressed thanks for the year gone by.

What struck me was that the thanks came more from middle- or low-income friends for whom the year had been difficult, shuttling between pawnshops and cell phone dealers to get a loan to pay tuition, medical bills, burial expenses. Yet they were the most effusive with their thanks—to God, to friends.

To express our thanks, we Filipinos like to share whatever blessings we have, so I'll be doing that: sharing some of the texted greetings that came in. But before that, I thought it important as well to do an "appreciation" for three great Filipinas, two of whom passed away just last year.

"Appreciation" is a term that's slowly replacing "obituary." I know it sounds odd to start the year with obituaries, but it's remembering, and appreciating, the legacies of loved ones and great minds that should help set us off on the right track for this new year. I intentionally chose three women for this appreciation, a way of recognizing that in spite of our very patriarchal institutions, and a patriarchal woman president, we are still a matricentric society, where women can and do trailblaze.

I want to start with Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma, who died on Jan. 2, 2006. Her many firsts as a woman are legendary: topping the bar, becoming a public prosecutor, heading a Court of First Instance and, eventually, becoming a Supreme Court justice. She was well-known for her strong sense of fair play, holding her ground and dissenting with other justices on crucial issues. Although appointed to the Supreme Court by Ferdinand Marcos, she chose to campaign for Cory Aquino in 1986.

Today, when the Supreme Court has become, it seems, the only government institution that can stand up against an increasingly authoritarian executive branch, ironically now headed by a woman, we can only hope that the gold standard set by Justice Muñoz Palma will remain.

I never got to meet her; I only heard her speak during martial law. I was more fortunate with Dr. Estefania Aldaba-Lim, who faxed me a letter a few years ago after I wrote about Jose Rizal's "Letter to the Women of Malolos." It turned out that "Tita Fanny," as she was affectionately called, had organized a group of descendants of those courageous women. Their group was eventually able to get Dr. Nicanor Tiongson to write a book about those courageous young women of the 19th century.

I knew of Tita Fanny because she had been social welfare secretary during Marcos' time. She was responsible for transforming the department from a dole-out agency to one which sought to help the poor help themselves.

I eventually met her in person when she attended the graduation ceremony of one of her grandsons. We kept in touch sporadically and I continued to be amazed at how wide her interests, and causes were, from the Museo Pambata to Gawad Kalinga, from the rights of children to family planning.

Tita Fanny died on March 7, 2006. The last time I saw her was in December 2005, during necrological services for Dr. Alfredo Lagmay. Curiously, it was only at that service when I learned that, together with Dr. Lagmay, she was among the pioneers of psychology in the Philippines and that she was the country's first clinical psychologist. One day, we really should reconstruct the role of women in shaping the social sciences in the Philippines; certainly, Tita Fanny will figure prominently when we do such a retrospective, a prime example of how social scientists can descend from their ivory towers and get so involved in public service.

Finally, we need to remember Sr. Mariani Dimaranan, who actually passed away on Dec. 17, 2005, but because it was the middle of the holidays I didn't get around to writing about her.

I knew Sister Mariani from her work as chair of the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), set up by the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) in 1974. She and her small band of feisty sisters were a thorn in the military's side, visiting political detainees and alerting the world to every new arrest, every new case of maltreatment, torture, disappearance. TFDP also launched livelihood projects, the political detainees producing greeting cards and handicrafts, some of which I still have today. One greeting card reads: "If you want to understand us, listen to what we're not allowed to say."

TFDP was there to pressure not just the military but also to shake the conscience of the more apathetic: the other religious, the bishops and eventually, Philippine society. Her persistence will be missed, especially as we see new arrests, assassinations and disappearances.

New Year greetings

Now to the texted New Year greetings. Last December, I mentioned that most of the Christmas texted greetings I got were in English. So when the New Year came around, it looked like my friends were more conscious about sending greetings in local languages. It was a bumper harvest of greetings, but because of space limitations, I had to choose only a few to share. Please bear with the translations; I took some liberties but, as translations go, it was impossible to capture the essence of the original.

The local language greetings were still mainly in Tagalog but Dean Zosimo Lee sent this in Waray: "*An akon hingyap para ha imo ngan han imo mga pinalangga. Mabulawdnon nga bago nga tuig* (My wish for you and your loved ones: a truly prosperous new year)."

The Tagalog greetings were often quite eloquent. Two friends sent this: "*Maulanan ang tanim sa hardin mo. Tanglawan ng bituin ang iyong gabi, at awitan ng ibon ang gising mo* (May the rains nurture whatever you plant in your garden. May the stars light your nights, and may you wake to the songs of birds)."

This greeting was originally from community educator Al Santos, forwarded through a friend, Opel, now based in Belgium: "*Parang mga singsing ng kawayan ang bawat taon. Tumitibay ang kahapon upang tukuran ang paglago ng bukas* (Each year is like a bamboo ring, our yesterdays becoming sturdier, supporting the tomorrows that will spring forth)."

Someone should put music to this greeting: "*Maghasik ng payapa, humabi ng awit at tula; magmahal, tumawa, makibaka, maglingkod sa kapwa, umasa sa katiyakan ng paglaya* (Sow peace, weave songs and poems, love, laugh, struggle, serve people and hope in the certainty of liberation)!"

Somehow, English greetings are best when brief. I got a rather lengthy one talking about how important it was to light candles in the darkness, but I thought the message was best captured by the last four words in the text "Shine bright, give light." This 2007, let's do just that, inspired by those who came ahead of us, lighting the way with their courage and commitment.

Unwanted fruits of inaction

ASSASSINS AND CRIMINALS HAVE BEcome bolder because of the prevailing culture of impunity. According to one report, there have been 802 political killings under the reign of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The latest addition in the statistics was Nelson Asocena, a 19-year-old Sangguniang Kabataan chair (from Cagayan Valley). (PDI, 12/18/06)

The number should be 803, if we include Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr., who was assassinated last Dec. 16.

This culture of impunity only encourages more killings. And to think that this is prevailing in a country that supposedly harks to the rule of law, and to peace and order.

If assassins can do it easily to a member of Congress, how much more to an ordinary citizen asserting his or her political rights? But unlike in the cases of murdered activists, church leaders and journalists, the police are up on their feet to solve the congressman's assassination.

The only conclusion I can draw from this is that the systematic extrajudicial killings, about which the Arroyo administration has hardly said anything, have paved the way for crimes against politicians who are entrenched in power. The administration's policy on political killings—a policy of indifference and inaction—is bearing unwanted fruits. Now, the politicians are crying for help.

Congressmen are saying that assassinations mark the start of the election period. The comment comes as natural as the sun rises and sets every day. And it is a cause for worry.

—MARCO M. DELOS REYES,
president, National Union
of Students of the Philippines,
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Priests should teach by living according to Gospel values

I AGREE THAT PRIESTS SHOULD ALSO undergo character change. (PDI, 12/29/06) For example, God calls on all of us to "go into the world and preach the Gospel to all nations." Priests, more than any other class of persons, are expected to abide by this injunction.

However, there are a number of priests who don't go out or speak to people about Christ. They just wait for the faithful to go to church. Instead of blaming wayward politicians, they should win them to the fold of the Church and explain to them that what they are doing is not in accord with the Gospel values.

Finally, they should not only preach; they should always inject the Gospel values into their lifestyle. It is only by their example that they will be able to leave an imprint on the lives of the people they serve.

—REGINALD B. TAMAYO,
member, Sangguniang Bayan,
Aparri, Cagayan

How can Americans trust our word?

IN THE NEWS REPORT HEADLINED "Palace to CA: Turn Smith over to us" (PDI, 12/25/06), Sen. Nene Pimentel was quoted as saying, "If the United States, the only superpower in the world, believes that the Balikatan exercises are not that vital for its security and ours, who are we to complain?"

This is the kind of idiotic statement that smacks of nothing more than a blind sense of nationalism. Of course, the Balikatan is extremely important to the United States in its fight against terrorists. But this isn't the crux of the matter, is it? Didn't he say it's simply a matter of law?

The Marine in question has already been convicted under Philippine law. Fine. As an outside observer and non-participant in any of the court proceedings, I cannot quibble with that verdict. However, if it is true and valid that under the Visiting Forces Agreement signed by both the United States and the Philippines, "visiting forces" found guilty of any crime committed within the legal jurisdiction of the host country should be handed over to the custody of the "visiting" country's consular officials pending completion of judicial proceedings, it follows that the lawful thing to do for the courts is to fulfill that commitment.

After this incident, what kind of assurance does the US military have that US servicemen training with and assisting their Filipino counterparts will be treated, while in the Philippines, in accordance with a legal agreement that is binding to both the US and Philippine government? In other words, can we Filipinos just disregard whatever treaty or legal agreement we signed with the United States and throw "visiting" American soldiers in a local jail?

If the US government really values this military exercise, the US officials won't mind, Pimentel said. If this oversimplification by an elected senator is not idiocy, then I don't know what is.

—ALBERT LLAGA,
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Issue of leadership in Charter change

CHARTER CHANGE, AS PROPOSED BY THE Arroyo administration's allies, is not just about the shift from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government. It is also about allowing congressmen to hold on to power, as they will automatically become members of Parliament (MPs), should Cha-cha push through. Once they're in Parliament, they can easily change the rules and do away with elections for as long as the Parliament is not dissolved. To believe that the congressmen-turned MPs will dissolve what keeps them in power is wishful thinking.

One of the sad lessons to remember from martial law is this: When government officials stay in power indefinitely and they introduce wrong economic policies, the errors are likely to be perpetuated. And even if discovered many years later, it is difficult to correct them.

Martial law was characterized, among others, by crony capitalism which discouraged legitimate local and foreign investors. The cronies, instead of going into new business ventures that could have expanded the economy and propelled it to growth, merely gobbled up existing attractive businesses. It was for this reason that the economy stagnated. And the economic gains we made under the presidential system—our economy became the second most prosperous country, after Japan, in Asia—were wasted.

Today, Cha-cha proponents want the nation to return practically to the same martial law government setup, where government officials wielded too much power and for unlimited terms. That setup may be different in form but not in substance: during martial law, there was one-man dictatorship; under a parliamentary system, there will be a collective "dictatorship" as we can now see and deduce from the actuations of those in power.

Consider the following: The congressmen do not care about what is right; they just go by their superior numbers. Proof of this? They would have none of the arguments for the impeachment of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, they would have none of the arguments against the constituent assembly. And they didn't care to help resolve the Garci tapes controversy; the questions in and about the Mayuga report; the election fraud charges; the P728 fertilizer scam. They are not even ashamed of their pork barrel, which people widely perceive as their kitty for corruption. Now, if the Cha-cha believers trust this kind of government officials who understand only the language of "number" (it sounds like "majority" and "pork barrel") but not reason—which reveals their tyrannical mind-sets; if Cha-cha advocates, including media commentators and columnists, want to be governed by the very same officials, that's their choice.

But many Filipinos know better.

—MARCELO L. TECSON,
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A politically mature nation

KUDOS TO ANTONIO MONTALVAN II for coming up with a level-headed assessment of the events leading to the poorly attended thanksgiving prayer rally. (PDI, 12/25/06) Maybe, the Filipino people are becoming politically mature, to say the least.

Here in Western Europe which is predominantly Catholic, the Church observes strictly the principle of the separation of Church and State. This is most probably the reason why the government is able to work for the common good without facing a lot of criticism from the Roman Catholic Church. Most of the people of Western Europe continue to live decently and respect human rights.

On the contrary, the majority of the Filipino people continue to live below the poverty line and human rights violations seem a normal part of their lives. All that the Roman Catholic Church does is criticize the government and tell its faithful to continue following the obsolete teachings of Christianity.

—FLORENCIO FUCANAN,
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Abalos finds an ally in Pimentel on poll automation

THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS, which said it was no longer prudent to automate the May 14 elections for lack of time, yesterday found an ally in Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr.

Pimentel said the Comelec made the right decision to drop the partial automation of the midterm elections because it was impossible for the body to set up the automated election system with less than five months to go before the vote.

He said the poll body would need more time to bid out the automation project, procure and test the counting machines, train personnel on their use and educate voters about the new system.

If this were hastily implemented, the computerized voting and counting process would be disastrous, the senator warned.

In the proposed Automated Election Act approved by Congress but has yet to be signed by President Macapagal-Arroyo, six provinces and six highly urbanized cities in Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao would be partially automated.

Flawed proposal

Full automation would be implemented in 2010.

"That is really a flawed proposal," Pimentel said in a statement, referring to the automation of six provinces and six cities. "And I think the Comelec is acting prudently by deciding not to go ahead with the automation of the coming elections," he added.

Without an automation law less than five months before the vote, Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos Sr. had said it was no longer prudent to automate the elections, a view shared by election lawyers of the President and of her former political rival, the late actor Fernando Poe Jr.

If at all, the electronic transmission of election results was more viable than automating the voting and counting process, Abalos said.

The proposed automation law sought to amend and expand the scope of the current automation law, Republic Act No. 8436, by authorizing the use of an automated electoral system in the voting, counting, consolidation, canvassing and transmission of election and other processes.

Sen. Richard Gordon, principal author of the Senate version of the bill, had dared the President to sign the measure into law to show her commitment to electoral reforms, insisting there was still ample time to automate the elections.

Pimentel pointed out that automating many areas would be disastrous if it failed. He said that the huge number of votes in the six provinces and six cities was sufficient to decide the fate of the senatorial candidates.

"Automation should not cover too many areas because if it falters, that will wreck the elections. Millions of voters may be disenfranchised and this is very unfair to them," Pimentel said.

During deliberations on the measure, the senator had proposed the pilot-testing of the automated electoral system in two provinces, two cities and two municipalities.

Revamp Comelec

But with or without automation, Pimentel maintained that the Comelec leadership should be revamped if only to restore public confidence in the body that had been tainted with allegations that it conspired with the Arroyo administration to rig the results of the 2004 presidential vote.

Without naming names, he said three Comelec commissioners were suffering from a serious credibility problem because of their supposed involvement in the voided P1.3-billion poll automation contract.

He said the three new commissioners—Romeo Brawner, Rene Sarmiento and Nicodemo Ferrer—should be given a chance to prove their worth in "conducting honest, orderly and peaceful elections next year."

The senator pressed Ms Arroyo anew to nominate the seventh commissioner from among the nominees of the opposition to avoid a repeat of the poll cheating in 2004. *TJ Burgonio*

Comelec to Congress: No budget ...

From page A1

Where are we going to get the money for it?" Abalos said in a phone interview.

Congress failed to pass the proposed budget due to disagreement over the P4.7-billion allotment for the Department of Education's food-for-school program.

After the bicameral conference committee failed to break the deadlock on the proposed budget, Congress adjourned on Dec. 21 for the holidays.

Since Monday, the government has been operating on the 2005 budget of P907.56 billion, the same amount adopted for 2006 because Congress also failed to pass the proposed budget for last year.

Comelec needs P4 billion

The Comelec needs about P4 billion for the holding of the senatorial and local elections in May, according to Abalos.

"We only got P700 million last year but what is that amount as against the P4-billion budget that we'll be needing to finance the coming elections?" he said.

Abalos, nevertheless, said he was confident that Congress would not postpone the elections and would find a way to give the Comelec the needed funding.

Remote possibility

"The possibility of having no election is very remote because I don't think Congress will allow that to happen," he said.

Abalos expressed the hope that Congress would pass the budget by the end of January so that the poll body could have enough time to procure materials and services for the polls.

"It would be very difficult for us if the budget would be approved later than that," he said.

Unacceptable habit

Sen. Joker Arroyo said Congress' habit of not passing the budget was "unacceptable."

"Happy new budget for 2007? No. For 2007, the Philippines would be operating, strictly speaking, on the basis of the 2005 budget or the budget which Congress enacted two years ago," Arroyo said.

The senator said the allotment of P4.7 billion for the DepEd's food-for-school program and the P400 million for the intelligence fund of President Macapagal-Arroyo was but a small fraction of the total amount.

"What this means is that the P1.126-trillion budget is held hostage by the controversy over P4.7 billion," Arroyo said.

The Senate, fearing the amount for the food-for-school program could be diverted for political purposes, had proposed that it be realigned to address the shortage of classrooms and teachers.

The program calls for a daily ration of rice to Grade 1 pupils from poor families.

The House panel had insisted that the amount be retained as originally proposed by Malacañang.

Arroyo noted that for two straight years the Senate and the House had failed to pass the budget on time.

"The budget is the most important piece of legislation that Congress is duty-bound to enact," he said.

Unfair to people

Arroyo said the practice was unfair to the people. "The government has a lot of excess monies which can be funneled for the common good, but which cannot be expended. What will we do with that? It is mind-boggling," he said.

Malacañang has consistently backed the House position, warning that the President will wield her veto power and declaring that it has no problem with reenacting the 2005 budget for this year if the senators stuck to their proposal.

Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. scoffed at the Palace position. "We will not allow the Senate to become a rubber-stamp body; we've never been a rubber-stamp body," he said.

Sen. Franklin Drilon, chair of the Senate panel, had indicated that the upper chamber wasn't inclined to agree to the House demand, saying the food-for-school program would only benefit the "already filthy rich importers and their patrons in government."

Yesterday, Villar said the Senate would press for the approval of the budget measure.

"The senators' affirmative response and our bias for enhancing the basic services needed by our people were clearly expressed in the General Appropriations Act of 2007, which we passed on Dec. 4," he said in a statement.

Spray-on condoms ...

From page A1

While Miss Israel Yael Nezri was exempted from carrying her assault rifle in the Israeli Army because it bruised her beauty queen legs, Mr. Switzerland Renzo Blumenthal lured lonely women who hate football to his country for the World Cup.

Careless thieves once again made headlines round the world. A burglar in Germany left behind a vital clue—his fingertip.

"We usually find fingerprints but it's not every day that the thieves leave the original there too," a police spokesperson said. It took only a few hours to track down the thief.

A Jordanian salesman was arrested for trying to fleece a money exchanger with a fake ID card bearing a Brad Pitt picture.

In Vienna, burglars fled after finding eight severed human heads. A dentist had stored the mummified heads for research.

'Wanted' pix of boosted boobs

Village leaders in India ordered 150 men to dip their hands in boiling oil to prove their innocence after food was stolen.

An Australian man stopped for drunk driving threatened police with a live snake that he picked up off the road.

In Cologne, a plastic surgeon, who was cheated out of payment by two women using fake names, gave "Wanted" pictures of their enlarged breasts to police. "It's probably the most unusual wanted poster police ever had," wrote top-selling Bild newspaper, which helpfully published life-size pictures of the boosted breasts.

There were tragic moments too. In Hanoi, a Vietnamese man famous on a national TV program for his ability to resist electric shocks was electrocuted while fixing a generator.

Accidental shooting

In Rio de Janeiro, a Brazilian man died when he tried to open a rocket-propelled grenade with a sledgehammer.

The political year began with a bang when US Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot a friend on a quail hunt.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany sparked rioting by admitting he lied to win a general election.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie pretended to slap a cheeky teenager for a photograph but was questioned by police after child protection officers reported her.

In Bangkok, Thai coup leaders banned go-go girls from dancing near tanks and posing for photos with soldiers because they were distracting the troops.

Bad judgment

Random acts of bad judgment in 2006 included the Philadelphia man who pulled a gun on his 7-year-old son's American football coach to demand more playing time.

In Koblenz, Germany, there was a woman caught driving her dead mother across country to save on mortuary transport costs.

Two women working at the German Labor Office got into trouble for writing e-mail at work moaning about their dull sex lives—and sending the exchange to thousands of coworkers.

A pilot of Air Canada's Jazz subsidiary got locked out of the cockpit after stepping out to go to the washroom.

Three doctors in India were caught by a TV camera agreeing to amputate healthy limbs of beggars who wanted more sympathy.

Strange moments

Love had its strange moments too. Two prisoners in an Ivory Coast jail got married after falling in love through the peephole in an iron prison door.

And in Finland, a court ruled against a 20-something woman who charged a 74-year-old man 25,500 euros to fondle her breasts on 10 occasions.

"Based on general life experience, it is indisputably clear that a charge of 25,500 euros is disproportionate to the compensation in question," Judge Hasse Hakki said. *Reuters*

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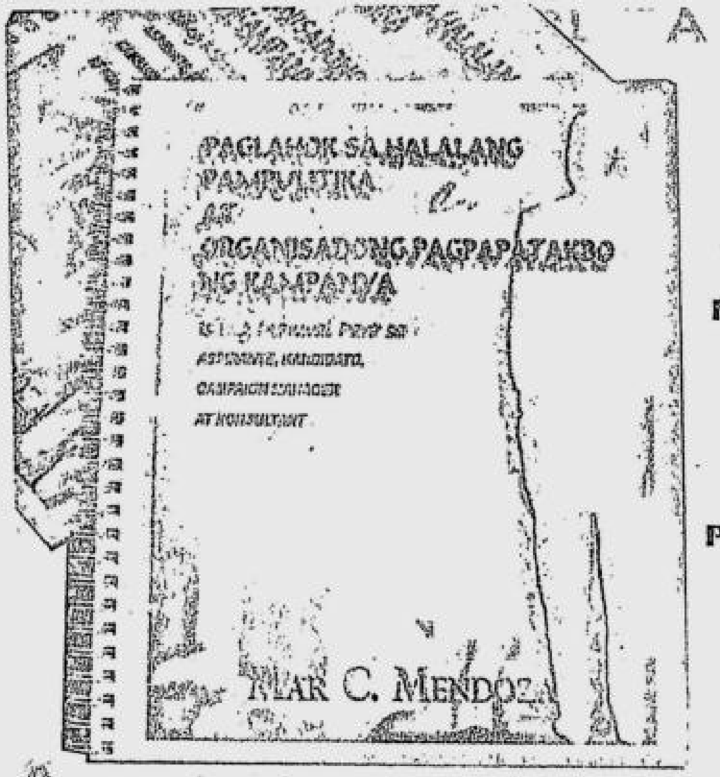
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RIGHTS OF FILIPINO WORKERS IN ISRAEL

More than 30,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) now toil in Israel. Almost 22,000 of them work without valid permits. These undocumented workers are at the mercy of their employers. They face daily the threats of arrest and deportation by Israeli authorities.

Half of them are victims of illegal recruiters and unscrupulous manpower agencies in Israel. Not a few take the risk and willingly go there as tourists, hoping to land jobs and stay on.

The other half is the product of Israel's 'bonding arrangement,' wherein employers have total control over the OFWs for their entire employment. OFWs who leave their employers -- because of abuse, death of the employer or any other reason – lose their legal status and end up undocumented if they fail to find new employers within thirty days.

AVOID BECOMING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN ISRAEL.

1. Avoid illegal recruitment. Check the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) [722-1144; 722-1155] list of licensed recruitment agencies. Check if the manpower agency in Israel is accredited by the Philippine Embassy [(972-3) 546-1499; 544-0527; 602-0549].

2. If you are working in Israel and are forced to leave your employer, report immediately to the Ministry of Interior to get a temporary tourist visa stamp (B/2). This is valid for one month, wherein you must find a new employer. Upon finding one, get a new work permit/visa (B/1) stamp in the name of the new employer.

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Palace steps into Baguio parking row

BAGUIO CITY—MALACAÑANG HAS ORDERED city officials to explain why they terminated the pay parking contract of a private firm, which caused the suspension of Mayor Braulio Yaranon.

Acting Mayor Reinaldo Bautista Jr. said the Jadewell Parking Systems Corp. had accused the officials of abuse of authority in November, the same charge that caused Yaranon's year-long suspension.

Yaranon, a retired regional trial court judge, won the 2004 mayoral race on a platform that was critical of contracts that the previous administration made with operators of Jadewell and developers of Camp John Hay.

But he was suspended for issuing two executive orders that encouraged motorists and the police to ignore Jadewell's authority to collect parking fees.

Malacañang rejected one of two appeals he filed last year to contest his suspension.

Months after Yaranon's suspension, Bautista and the council nullified the ordinance legalizing Jadewell's 12-year management contract, ending the firm's authority to collect fees and tow vehicles.

The city government terminated the contract in October last year.

Deputy Executive Secretary Manuel Gaite of the Office of the President sent city officials a Dec. 5 directive requiring them to explain their actions following a Nov. 13 complaint filed by Rogelio and Norma Tan, Jadewell's owners.

It did not appear that President Macapagal-Arroyo had been apprised about the issue when she hosted a dinner for local officials on Dec. 26, Bautista said.

"We did not raise it to her anyway, out of delicadeza, but [Ms Arroyo] kept assuring us that she will support all our actions," he said.

The city government has removed traffic signs installed by the firm and is studying whether it now owns about 20 automated parking meters installed by Jadewell, "so we can remove them," the mayor said.

"Removing these items is important because we show the public we are removing the vestiges of Jadewell's presence in the city," he said.

Motorists and businessmen stormed the firm's office in November, claiming the firm no longer had the right to operate.

Rogelio Tan and Councilor Jose Molintas engaged in a fight when the councilor and a lawyer accosted the businessman in their attempt to make a citizen's arrest. Tan was arrested but he posted bail.

A bomb explosion that hit a toilet in City Hall and reports that a motorist fired his gun at Jadewell's parking lot were also attributed to the controversy.

But Bautista said his office would continue to treat these cases as isolated incidents.

"We know there is the possibility that we will be suspended also," he said.

But some of the officials said they were ready to take the risk because their terms are ending in May.

Jadewell set up its street parking business in the city in 2002, shortly after Tan tried to sell automated European parking meters he imported from Malaysia.

Mrs. Tan said the firm never intended to be caught in the middle of a scandal.

"We came here in good faith to help regulate traffic. We do not want to be hounded out of Baguio simply because we were party to a contract made by their political enemies. We would gladly leave all of these behind us, but [the city government] should be able to return our investments," she said.

Tan said the validity of the Jadewell contract is under review by the Supreme Court. He said the city government's actions interfered with the court's process. *Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

Gloria won't interfere in convention center woes

BAGUIO CITY—PRESIDENT MACApagal-Arroyo told city officials last week that Malacañang will not intervene in the city's purchase of the Baguio Convention Center, which will soon be repossessed by the Government Service Insurance System.

The city government had turned to Ms Arroyo after GSIS senior vice president Renato Santico informed local officials that the city was in danger of forfeiting the facility because it failed to pay three years worth of the amortization to complete the P250-million deal.

GSIS could already reclaim the property on Jan. 6 under the terms of the sales contract between former Mayor Bernardo Vergara and GSIS president and general manager Winston Garcia.

During dinner she hosted for local officials at the Mansion last week, Ms Arroyo told acting Mayor Reinaldo Bautista Jr. that she saw no legal way for Malacañang to mediate the transaction.

Should the city lose the convention center, Bautista said the city government would demand that the Bases Conversion Development Authority pay its outstanding shares using leased portions of Camp John Hay.

"We can develop the land into a new convention facility or a new special economic zone so we can earn back [the profits we will lose once GSIS reclaims the convention center]," Bautista said.

The convention center was built by former First Lady Imelda Marcos to host the 1978 world chess match between Anatoli Karpov and Viktor Korchnoi.

Vergara bought the building from GSIS in February 2003, using P50 million advanced by the BCDA, which is Baguio's share in the rent of a Camp John Hay developer. *Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

REMEMBERING

NIÑO JESUS ORBETA/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

Survivors of mudslides and floods brought by Supertyphoon Reming in Albay light candles Dec. 30 at the Our Lady of the Gate Parish in Daraga, Albay to honor the memory of loved ones who died in the disaster.

Mayor's bodyguard held for vice mayor's slay

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—A POLICEMAN, who served as the bodyguard of the mayor of Tapaz, Capiz, was held for Saturday's assassination of the town's vice mayor and the killing of two others.

Senior Supt. Rey Rafal, head of the Task Force Gardose, said the police consider PO3 Danilo Gelilang as a suspect in the killing of Vice Mayor Victor Gardose, Caridad village chief Leonardo Gimeno Sr. and Gardose's bodyguard, Anthony Gequillo.

Rafal said Gelilang is a member of the Tapaz police force and assigned as a bodyguard of Mayor Romualdo Exmundo.

Gelilang was arrested a day after the killings and is now detained at the Capiz Provincial Police office in Roxas City.

Exmundo said he was aware that Gelilang was called for questioning but did not know that his bodyguard was considered a suspect.

He denied any involvement in the killings.

"I am saddened with what has happened and it is unfair to me and my family to be linked to this in any way," he said in a telephone interview.

According to Exmundo, he wants the killers to be apprehended and the case solved soon.

Rafal said police would file charges of illegal possession of firearms against Gelilang for carrying a .45 cal. pistol aside from his service firearm from the Philippine National Police.

Gelilang had claimed that he only borrowed the firearm from a soldier.

Paraffin tests on Gelilang yielded negative results but the tests conducted on Gelilang's unlicensed firearm showed that it was fired recently.

Investigators are still waiting for the results of ballistic tests to determine if it was one of the firearms used in the killings.

Rafal said Gelilang has a "history of being used by politicians."

Death toll in Ormoc dep't store fire now 26

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—THE DEATH toll in the Unitop fire in Ormoc City rose to 26 after two-year-old Anton Kurl Tarrayo died Monday night.

The boy died 7:45 p.m. at the Ormoc Sugar Planters Association (Ospa) Hospital, five days after his mother Teresa died of serious burn injuries, according to Elsie Jaca, surveillance nurse of the city health office.

The remains of the boy were immediately brought to the family's residence in Barangay Juaton, 7 km from the city proper, where his mother's body lies.

The boy's father, Deoden, is expected to arrive today from Saudi Arabia where he works.

Mother and son were among the people inside the Unitop Marketing when fire struck the store Dec. 25. The fire reportedly started when a boy lit a firecracker inside the establishment.

At least 24 people died that day while several others were injured. The fatalities were buried last week at the Ormoc City public cemetery.

The management had agreed to pay P125,000 each to the relatives of those who died, on top of a P5,000 assistance extended by Ormoc City Mayor Eric Codilla.

The settlement, however, would not stop the criminal case filed against the management.

Last Friday, the city fire office, through FO1 Virgilio Betancor, officer-on-case, filed a complaint of reckless imprudence, resulting in multiple murder, at the City Prosecutor's Office against Unitop owner Ricardo Lim Brito and store administrator Kenneth Tan.

6 Chinese poachers pay ₱30,000 each to leave jail

SIX OF THE 30 CHINESE FISHERmen caught illegally entering the protected Tubbataha Reefs National Park (TRNP) have been released on bail moments after a Palawan judge ordered them imprisoned, a government official said Tuesday.

Angelique Songco, manager of the Tubbataha Marine Office (TMO), said the six suspected Chinese poachers were able to post bail before they were brought to the Palawan provincial jail in Puerto Princesa, on Monday afternoon.

She said each paid P30,000.

Songco said Judge Perfecto Pe, of Branch 42 of the Puerto Princesa regional trial court, signed the petition for bail of the arrested Chinese nationals shortly after he issued their commitment order.

She said the counsel of the six filed the petition for bail so they could look after their boat docked at the Puerto Princesa Port.

"The six paid for their bail bond because they wanted to guard their boat. But they made a commitment to the court that they will report regularly during the hearings," Songco told the INQUIRER in a phone interview.

The suspected poachers were committed to the jail facility almost two weeks after they were caught entering the protected park in southern Palawan while in possession of an endangered fish species.

The Chinese nationals, aboard their fishing boat Hoi Wan, were brought to Puerto Princesa last Dec. 31, or 10 days after TMO staff intercepted them inside the Tubbataha Reefs, considered one of world's most beautiful marine environments and dive sites.

Songco said they will closely monitor the movements of the six Chinese fishermen.

"They are not allowed to leave the country. They should be here unless the court orders their [permanent] release. But I don't see any reason the court would allow their release," she added.

Songco said the Chinese poachers were sent to jail based on the criminal case that the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources filed for violation of Section 87 of the Fisheries Code which prohibits poaching of fish species.

Aside from poaching, she said BFAR also filed separate cases for violation of Sections 97 and 100 of the said law, which bans the possession of rare and endangered fish species, and its exportation.

TMO personnel found at least 300 live Napoleon Wrasse, locally known as *Mameng*, an endangered fish species, from a water basin inside the suspects' boat. *Mameng* is considered the world's biggest reef fish and is protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) II.

Also confiscated from the boat were 500 lapu-lapu, 500 red snappers, 11 *sampan* (small boats) and air compressor.

Songco said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has likewise filed a case against the Chinese for violation of the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act.

"We will also file a criminal case against them for possession of air compressors which is outlawed by a provincial ordinance in Palawan," she said.

Songco said BFAR personnel have started the inventory of fishes found from the boat.

She said once finished, BFAR would release the fish in a still undetermined location.

"We expect the release of the fishes within the day," she said. *Marlon Ramos, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

THIRTY Chinese fishermen found in the Tubbataha Reefs two weeks ago were committed to the provincial jail in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan on Dec. 31.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

E-mail: pr_provincial_news@inquirer.com.ph

INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor **Jun Bandayrel**
Bureau Chief **Rolando B. Fernandez**

AERIAL view of the Subic Bay Freeport, among the top investment havens in Central Luzon.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Infra projects, investments to boost C. Luzon economy

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND business leaders in Central Luzon are largely optimistic about 2007.

The upbeat mood comes mainly from the completion of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEx) in October or November, finally connecting three economic powerhouses in the region—the Subic Bay Freeport, Clark Special Economic Zone, and the Luisita Industrial Park. All infrastructures there, primarily the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport in Clark and the seaport in Subic, are bound to help make Central Luzon a "Little China," according to economist Bernardo Villegas.

OUTLOOK

But Rene Romero, private sector representative in the National Economic and Development Authority, gives this reminder: It is not things that fuel economic growth. People do.

Government leaders, Romero said, should provide a policy and regulatory climate that brings and sustains opportunities to local entrepreneurs, professionals, workers, farmers and fishermen. Good governance, in his view, would be a key deciding factor in whether life would really be good this time.

For those old enough to have seen wars, disasters, elections, economic boom and poverty in their lifetime, a new year spells good times if public leaders actually do their mandate. "Nung magsilbi lang tutu (If they serve well)," said farmer Dominador Laxamana, 70.

The INQUIRER*'s Pampanga correspondent Tonette Orejas asked several business, political and government leaders in the region on how things may shape up in 2007. Here are their views.*

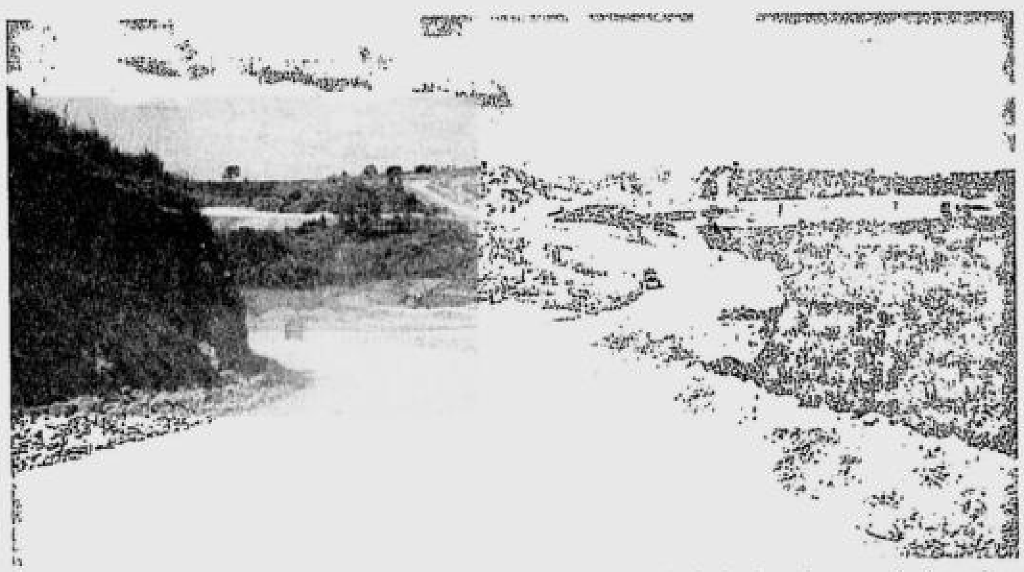
Remegio Mercado, *regional director, Neda:*

I see a bright year ahead as big and small players position themselves and take in optimum benefits from ongoing infrastructure projects, such as the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway and NorthRail. Port and airport-based industries, including tourism, will occupy the driver's seat. Business process outsourcing, such as medical transcription, call centers, computer graphics and animation, and construction will be on the rise and shall be major employment providers.

Blesila Lantayona, *regional director, Department of Trade and Industry:*

The results of pump-priming by the national government will be felt more strongly. We have seen that most of our local governments are doing their part, especially in streamlining the process of the issuance of licenses, certificates and clearances, which is really good for business. Prices will continue to stabilize. Central Luzon will continue to be a major exporter with the contribution of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). *(Last year, export was pegged at $4.903 billion. SME share is about 10 percent. On the third quarter of 2006, export was pegged at $3.3 billion, with SME share also at around 10 percent. For 2007, the same share is projected at 12 percent of the $5.97-billion export target—Ed.)*

Central Luzon will be in the center stage of countryside regional development with the influx of more investments



BUSINESS and government leaders in Central Luzon are optimistic that the completion of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway this year will spur growth in the region.

Secretary Edgardo Pamintuan, *chair, Subic-Clark Alliance Development Program, and chief, Luzon Urban Beltway:*

2007 will see the reemergence of Central Luzon as a major contributor to the economy, no longer in agriculture but in industry and as key investment destination. Clark and Subic will finally begin to live up to their potentials as a major player in the logistics and supply chain, which is what President Macapagal-Arroyo envisions.

Renato Diaz, *presidential adviser for Central Luzon:*

I foresee sustained growth and development as the various infrastructures are near completion. The region will get more investments, tourism and trade, making a bid as the country's premier region.

Levy Laus, *president-chief executive officer, Clark Development Corp.:*

I see a very stable and bullish economic outlook for 2007. Central Luzon will be in the center stage of countryside regional development with the influx of more investments. The completion of the SCTEx will catapult dramatic growth and interest in the region.

Regidor de Leon, *regional executive director, Department of Environment and Natural Resources:*

The rehabilitation of watershed areas, rehabilitation and establishments of mangrove forests, and enforcement of efficient solid waste management will accompany efforts in economic development to ensure sufficient natural resources for growth.

Pampanga Rep. Reynaldo Aquino:

The proximity of the region to Metro Manila will continue to bear economic and political gains; the intensity will increase since 2007 is an election year. Clark will continue to enjoy growth with its new industrial locators and the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport has become a reliable source for tourism and trade … For as long as the peace and order situation is maintained and calamities avoided, the year promises holistic gains for the northern and central provinces of Luzon.

Aurora Rep. Juan Edgardo Angara:

For certain parts of the region, the prospects look good given that the government is spending on infrastructures like the Clark airport and the roads leading to it. Hopefully, the government can fund other roads which have been historically neglected like the Pantabangan-Aurora road which is a key to unlocking the many potentials of Aurora and which will also positively affect the region's economy by promoting trade and tourism.

Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo:

We will further feel the gains of our fiscal reforms that Congress has worked for. The upswing of the stock market and the strong performance of the Philippine currency are definitely signs of continued economic growth.

Chief Supt. Ismael Rafanan, *regional director, Philippine National Police:*

Sustained anticrime efforts in villages will cause a big drop in crime rates. The anti-insurgency drive shall likewise be in full blast to provide the peace factor in investments.

Lt. Gen. Bonifacio Ramos, *chief of the Armed Forces' Northern Luzon Command:*

The lack of [New People's Army] cadres, new recruits and source of logistics, liberation of affected barangays, the people's support for government efforts, and enhanced military and economic development efforts will lead to the decline of insurgency in the region.

Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo:

With Oplan Bantay Laya II set for implementation, we can expect continued human rights violations toward 2010. The May 2007 elections may prove to be bloody too as National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales is bent on preventing Bayan Muna and its allied party-list groups from winning seats in Congress.

Aurora Broquil, *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya:*

Central Luzon will be the center of investigation on the continuing extrajudicial killings and militarization. The worsening economic and political repression will push the people further to assert their rights.

Rene Romero, *president, Pampanga Chamber of Commerce, and private sector representative, Neda:*

The business sector is looking at a very bright 2007. The first quarter will see candidates infusing money on elections-related items. The opening of the SCTEx in the third quarter will increase tourist arrivals and create additional jobs. We are bullish.

Nestor Mangio, *president, Central Country Estate:*

We are very bullish on real estate since a lot of infrastructures are being built like the SCTEx and NorthRail. The DMIA is being groomed as a premier airport. More workers are bound for abroad while Filipino-Americans prefer to retire in the Philippines. With the stronger peso, construction costs are expected to go lower. House-and-lot packages will be the product to sell and construction has a 16.6-percent multiplier effect on the economy.

Jose de Jesus, *president, Manila North Tollways Corp.:*

I believe Central Luzon, particularly the Subic and Clark areas, will see an accelerated pace of development. The North Luzon Expressway has proved to be a major catalyst to these developments and later, when the SCTEx opens, we expect an even faster rate of growth.

The many tastes, looks and names of 'sisig'

THE SIZZLING "*SISIG*" WENT BY different tastes, looks and names in Angeles City when professional and amateur chefs prepared 177 recipes during the fourth Sisig Festival last month.

What's on the menu? Sisig using *bayawak* (mountain lizards), *kamaru* (crickets), *tugak* (frogs) and the standard grilled pig head, among other things.

Veering away from the ancient version made from unripe sour fruits to Lucing Cunanan's 1970s concoction of chopped grilled pig cheeks and chicken liver soured by *kalamansi* (Philippine lemon) and spiced by *siling labuyo* (chili) and onions, participants made the *sisig* the single Kapampangan cuisine with the most number of versions.

Last year, participants prepared 176 recipes. The additional recipe this year marked the 177th founding anniversary of Angeles City, formerly Barangay Kuliat and once a part of Pampanga's capital of San Fernando.

While variety was the rule of the event, everything *sisig* was served on sizzling iron plates—an innovation introduced by Sisig Benedict in Angeles and institutionalized by Trellis Restaurant in Quezon City.

The plates retained longer heat and let out aroma for the 10 judges to savor.

Before midnight, Congo Grille Bar's "*sizzling page* (manta ray)," Red Crab's "exotica" made of snake meat and Aling Maring's "cricket *bopis*" landed first, second and third, respectively, in the professional's exotic category.

Congo chef Rey Natividad put in fresh *page* doused with flour, lemons, carrots and chili finger. Red Crab head cook Juanito Tongol Jr. sprinkled the snake meat with onions and lemons. Aling Maring's Lynette Tamayo heightened the flavor of crickets with pork lungs bubbling with tomato paste, ginger and vinegar.

In the seafood category, "*sisig tahong*" (green mussels) pushed Congo Grille to victory. The mix of fish fillet, squid and *taba ng talangka* gave Red Crab the second place.

Klub Bossa's jumble of shrimp and lobster ball on chili sauce was third.

In the meat category, Congo Grille, Red Club and Klub Bossa grabbed the top three spots by largely sticking to the *sisig* version of the 1970s.

Sisig, vegetable-style, had winners in barangay nutrition scholar Nimfa Villanueva (broccoli), street food vendor Roel Cabigting (*labong* or bamboo shoots) and hotel and restaurant management student Ross John Santos (*labanos* or radish).

The sizzling *kwek-kwek* (quail meat) of Jeankie Tobias topped the poultry category. The "Christmas *sisig*" (chicken breast) of Arem Owen Rodriguez grabbed second, while the chicken breast *sisig* with pig brain and chicken liver prepared by Rosalina Nuguid was third.

The exotic versions cast good lots in day care worker Josephine de Ocera's "bat and balls *sisig*" (carabao testicles), Nathan John Macalagay's "snail *sisig*" and Neriza de la Cruz's "sizzling fish seviche" (*tanguigue*).

In meat, Rebecca Yandan ruled with her "Ric special *sisig*" that stuck to the original recipe. Lizabel Sese deviated by adding *chicharon* to the recipe. Editha Torres' "*sisig la mestiza*" added horseradish to the ground pork lungs.

De la Cruz's "sizzling Mongolian scallops" romped off with the top prize in the seafood category. Maryanne Polis' "*alimasag* and squid *sisig*" was second, while Joel Bautista's "shrimp butterfly," which used five kilograms of seafood in butter and lemon, was third.

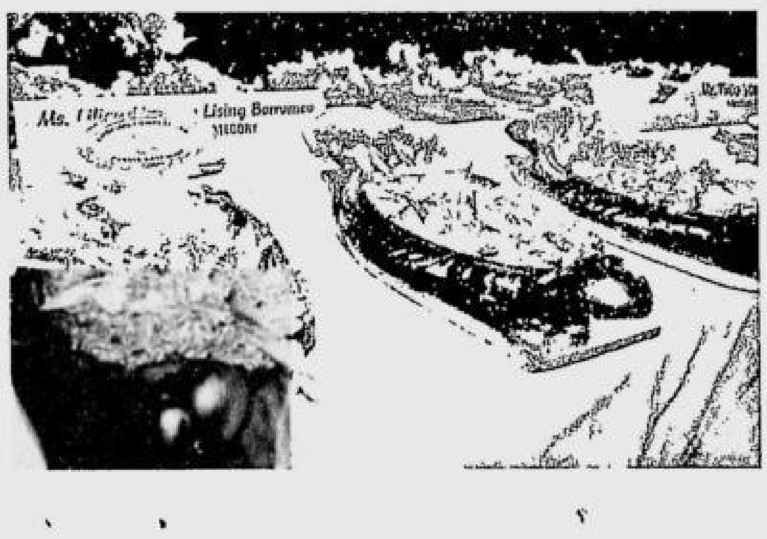
Mayor Carmelo Lazatin was happy for the showcase of diversity in the preparation of sisig, which he called "uniquely ours (in Angeles City)."

A big photograph of a smiling Lazatin was plastered on the giant sizzling plate (16 feet by 32 feet, ¼ inch thick) used in 2003 when the city government cooked 600 kg of pork sisig that fed 4,000 people.

What is perhaps a tribute to the sisig is a chapter about it in the newly launched book, "Food Tour," by artist and chef Claude Tayag.

Tonette Orejas

SOME of the 177 tastes and looks of Pampanga's "sisig" during Angeles City's Sisig Festival last month.
PHOTOS BY TONETTE T. OREJAS



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Lawyers offer gov't half of Marcos money

By Daxim L. Lucas

A LAWYER REPRESENTING HUMAN rights victims of the Marcos regime yesterday offered to split with the Presidential Commission on Good Government $25 million in disputed Marcos assets being held by the Singapore branch of a German bank.

Lawyer Rod Domingo Jr., apparently confident that his clients were winning against the government in a court case in Singapore over ownership of the funds, offered "to split the money 50-50" with the PCGG.

The money is from the Swiss deposits of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos that were ordered transferred to the Philippines after the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that they were ill-gotten.

The $25 million is part of the original $356 (grown to $658 million) taken from five Liechtenstein foundations—that the Swiss Supreme Court said were "instrumentalities" of Marcos to hide the money—which kept the funds in Swiss banks.

The money was being held in escrow by the Philippine National Bank, the court-appointed escrow agent, while the cases against the Marcoses were being decided in the courts.

When the SC decision declaring the Marcos deposits ill-gotten and the order to transfer the $658 million to the Philippine government came, the West Landsbank (WestLB) in Singapore refused to release the $25 million until a Singapore court ruled on their ownership.

The $25 million is being claimed by the government, the Golden Buddha Corp. and the estate of Roger Roxas, and the Marcos rights abuse victims to settle part of the $2 billion judgment that they won against the Marcos estate in a United States court in 1995.

Last week the Singapore appellate court rejected a motion from the Philippine government to stop the proceedings to determine the ownership of the $25 million, effectively ensuring that a lengthy court case among the competing claimants will continue.

Taking this to mean a victory for his clients, Domingo came forward with his offer to the PCGG which intends to appeal the Singapore court ruling.

"We're willing to talk. Even if we're winning, we're willing to sit down [with them] and negotiate," Domingo said.

"We are offering to solve this problem, but first they have to agree in principle," Domingo said.

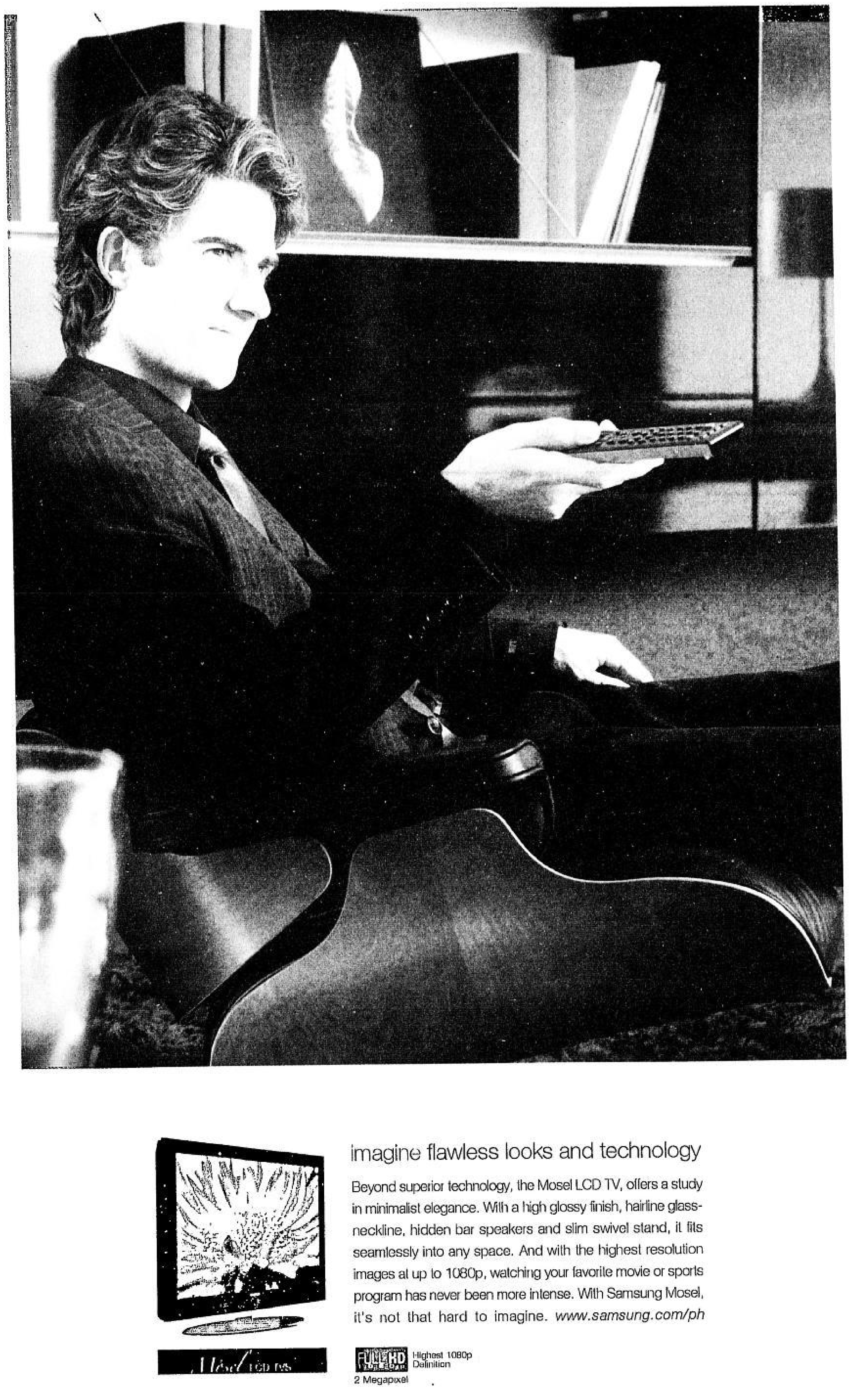
"We're not hostile. We want to offer a piece of this to the government," he said.

But he doubted the PCGG would accept because "politics is involved here. We cannot fight when there's horse-trading involved."

Domingo said the PCGG had offered an asset-trading deal in the case of the $35 million belonging to a Marcos dummy foundation, Arelma, that US Judge Manuel B. Real has ordered transferred to a US bank to settle part of the $2 billion judgment he awarded to the rights abuse victims.

The PCGG lost an appeal against the decision before a US appellate court last November. But the PCGG said it has until February to appeal the case to the US Supreme Court.

Domingo said it would not agree to the PCGG offer of a deal on the Arelma account as he said his clients were heavily favored to win the case.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Buyers, gov't defer sale of PLDT stake

By Daxim L. Lucas

THE ADVERSE PUBLICITY THAT MET THE initial moves to dispose of the government's remaining stake in the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) may have given prospective buyers pause, according to a senior official with knowledge of the deal.

The controversy fanned by politicians opposed to the deal has forced the government and buyers led by Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd. to postpone the signing of a purchase sale agreement planned for last Friday.

"I think the Japanese are getting worried," said the official who asked not to be named as he has been prohibited from speaking to the media about the issue.

The Japanese telecom giant NTT DoCoMo, is a minority shareholder in the country's largest telecommunications firm. Together with PLDT majority owner First Pacific, NTT DoCoMo has expressed its intention to acquire control over an additional six percent of PLDT stock indirectly, through a 14-percent stake in the Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp. (PTIC), which owned about 6.4 percent of PLDT.

The unnamed official said PLDT chair and First Pacific managing director Manuel V. Pangilinan also wanted more time to raise the money.

He said he was not sure why the buyers' group assembled by Pangilinan was put off by the adverse publicity, but he said, "Pangilinan should be used to that by now."

Under the plan initially laid out with the help of the finance department, the First Pacific-NTT DoCoMo tandem would have shelled out 50 percent of the P25.2 billion purchase price for the PTIC shares with the signing of the tripartite sale agreement last Friday.

But the First Pacific group sent word that it would only be able to pay P1.5 billion by Friday, partly because its Japanese partners had been put off by the controversy, the official explained. But even that failed to materialize.

DOJ OKs raps against Abra gov

By Armand N. Nocum

THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE YESTERDAY approved the filing of criminal charges against Abra Gov. Vicente Valera, his driver and a bodyguard who were arrested for illegal possession of firearms on Dec. 29 in Quezon City.

In a four-page resolution, the DOJ recommended the filing of charges before the Quezon City regional trial court for violation of Presidential Decree No. 1866 and Republic Act No. 8294, which regulate ownership and possession of firearms, against Valera, his driver Pedro Castillo, and companion Leo Bello.

"The inquest prosecutor is convinced that all respondents conspired to hold and possess all the firearms and grenade found in the Suburban car. Any or all of the respondents have unlimited access and use of said firearms found inside the car, only respondent Valera should be charged for illegal possession of the two unlicensed firearms and grenade, based on the letter request for the release of four firearms and Suburban, he admitted possession and control of the firearms," said the resolution signed by State Prosecutor Romeo B. Senson.

The DOJ prosecutor also recommended a bail of P310,000 for their temporary liberty.

The resolution came following a complaint filed by the Philippine National Police-Traffic Management Group (PNP-TMG) Task Force Limbas that apprehended Valera and his companions.

Traffic enforcers had flagged down Valera's vehicle, a Chevrolet Suburban, at about 3 a.m. Friday, when they noticed that it had no license plate. Upon inspection, police found the guns inside the vehicle.

Aplus METRO
Editor **Ester G. Dipasupil**
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Villarosa returns to Muntinlupa jail

Ex-solon granted emergency leave to treat 'heart problem'

FILE photo of former Rep. Jose Villarosa who was back at the New Bilibid Prisons yesterday after he was rushed to the Makati Medical Center on Dec. 24 where he stayed for nine days. With him is his wife, Occidental Mindoro Rep. Amelita Villarosa. RAFFY LERMA

By Jocelyn R. Uy

MURDER CONVICT AND FORmer Congressman Jose Villarosa is back at the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City after his nine-day confinement at the Makati Medical Center for heart problems.

The former Occidental Mindoro representative arrived at the maximum security compound of the national penitentiary a few minutes past 10 a.m. on board an ambulance of the Bureau of Corrections.

Villarosa left prison on the afternoon of Dec. 24 for emergency reasons, NBP Director Vicente Vinarao told the INQUIRER over the phone last week.

Vinarao had also denied reports that the former solon, who was sentenced to death last year with six others for killing the two sons of his political rival, former Rep. Ricardo Quinto, was granted a "holiday break."

According to Vinarao, Villarosa had to be rushed to the hospital because his blood pressure had shot up and his legs were also swollen.

"It was an emergency. We had to take him out of jail and bring him to another hospital because we do not have the facilities to attend to his needs," the NBP official told the INQUIRER last week.

He also called the incident a "matter of life and death."

When he returned to prison yesterday, Villarosa was accompanied by his wife, Rep. Amelita Villarosa, several security escorts and a doctor, prison insiders said.

INQUIRER sources added that they saw him limping toward his "*kubol*," (quarters) where he stayed for the rest of the noon. The murder convict also seemed teary-eyed and was heard speaking in a soft voice.

Some inmates, however, said they do not believe that Villarosa is sick. A few days before he was rushed to the hospital, they said he looked fit and regularly did his work in the livelihood center he had built near his cell.

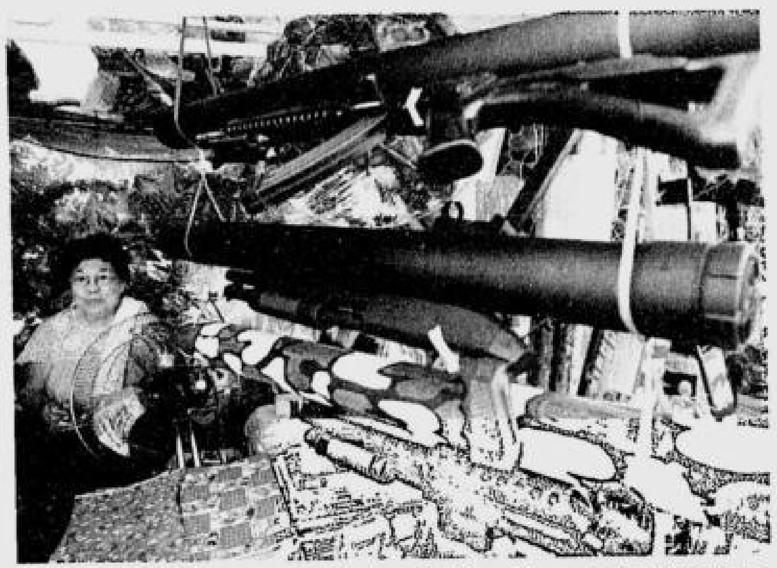
Villarosa and six farmers—who were later on called the "Mamburao Six"—were given the death penalty on March 1 by a Quezon City lower court for the killing of Quintos' two sons, Michael and Paul, in 1997.

The sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment after the abolition of the death penalty.

The Quintos brothers were attending a party in Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro when they were shot by masked gunmen.

Villarosa was accused of masterminding the killing, which was believed to be politically motivated. But he denied the charge, claiming the victims' father was not a threat to his political career.

Atienza endorses ban on use of 'boga'



MANY injuries that occurred during the New Year celebrations were attributed to the use of the *boga* by merrymakers. JOAN BONDOC

By Tina G. Santos

MANILA MAYOR LITO ATIENZA yesterday urged the City Council to immediately pass an ordinance banning the *boga* as he cited the danger posed by the popular holiday noisemaker to the public.

Citing the report given by city health officer in charge Dr. Jose Baranda, Atienza said 31 percent or 71 out of the 230 cases of firecracker-related injuries during the New Year celebration were caused by the *boga*.

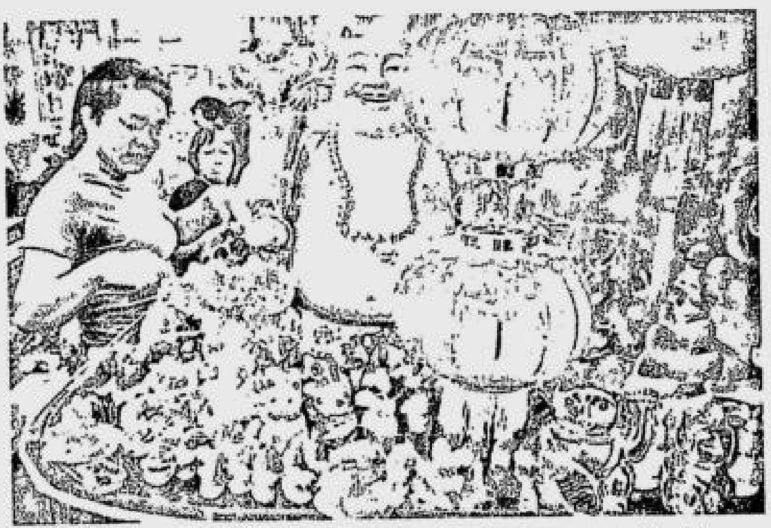
He added that most of the victims were children below 10 years old who sustained eye and ear injuries as well as facial burns.

Atienza had earlier ordered policemen in the city to confiscate the device which has become very popular among youths.

The *boga* is an improvised cannon fashioned out of PVC pipes. It sets off a loud explosion when the user squirts denatured alcohol at one end of the pipe and then lights up the mixture with a cigarette lighter or a gas stove igniter activated by a triggering mechanism.

"We consider the *boga* a very destructive and dangerous toy, that's why it should not be allowed," Atienza said.

He ordered barangay officials to confiscate all *boga* in their respective jurisdictions to minimize the risks posed by the device, even after New Year's Day.



PEOPLE looking for luck in the Year of the Pig have started looking for charms in Binondo stores. REM ZAMORA

Luck comes in many shapes in Chinatown

By Tina G. Santos

WITH THE START OF THE NEW Year, residents in the City of Manila are making a beeline for Chinatown in Binondo to search for lucky charms.

"I'm venturing into a clothing business this year so I'm looking for some kind of a good luck charm," said Rosalie Go-Li, 36, a housewife from Malate, Manila.

In the different shops dotting colorful Chinatown, luck comes in different shapes and sizes.

Clients can choose from figurines in the shape of a coin, a fish or a frog. There are also statues of Buddha made of porcelain, metal, wood, crystal, jade or other precious stones.

Since 2007 is the year of the Fire Pig, according to the Chinese calendar, charms in the shape of a pig are the biggest sellers, said Beverly Chan, 54, a store attendant.

Juanita Chua, 56, a restaurant owner in Valenzuela City, said she was looking for a good luck charm that would ensure financial prosperity for her family.

This being the Year of the Pig, Chua noted that some people might take this as a sign not to work too hard.

"This is because the pig is an animal that does not labor and just eats and sleeps all day," Chua said. "This can mean financial prosperity provided one achieves a balance between enjoyment and work."

She added, "The tendency is for a person to become lax because the pig is a lazy creature. If you succumb to this behavior, you will not progress. Perhaps what I need is a charm that would give me and my family more enthusiasm to work harder this year."

Grace Sam says she just goes with the flow. "Many people say these charms bring good luck. I don't see anything wrong with that."

Shooting incidents disturb Pasig residents

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

AN UNEASY CALM HAS DEscended on a crowded street in Pasig City a day after a shooting spree which killed a 50-year-old man and injured nine persons who were attending a New Year's Eve party.

"The area is already peaceful," city police chief Senior Supt. Francisco Uyami told the INQUIRER.

"But many residents are still afraid because of what happened," he added.

Four men on board two motorcycles opened fire on a group of residents holding a party on Santos Street in Barangay Palatiw a few minutes after midnight on Jan. 1.

Uyami said teams from the Special Weapons and Tactics group as well as from the city mobile unit have been deployed to monitor the area and prevent possible retaliatory attacks.

Police theorized that the shooting spree could have been triggered by a dispute between warring groups of residents and that Sunday's attack could be connected to previous brawls.

Police already have sketches of two of the four suspects and investigators are now following up leads to identify and arrest the killers, Uyami said.

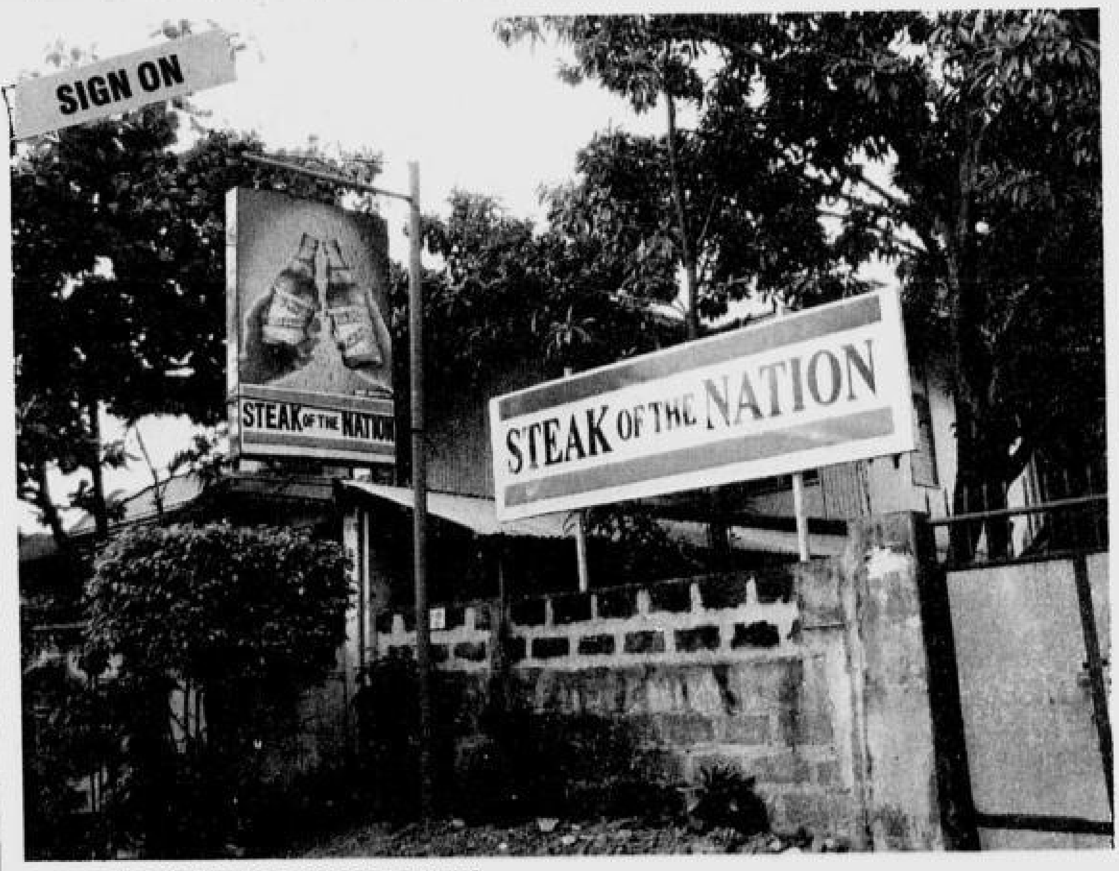
But in the meantime, the police have another shooting incident to investigate.

Forty-three year-old Armando Pantaleon had just come from a grocery store with his wife in Barangay Palatiw when a man suddenly approached him. The man was carrying a .45-caliber handgun.

Pantaleon ran but the man chased him and as he reached Barangay Pinagbuhatan, the suspect shot him in the head, SPO2 Robert Garcia also told the INQUIRER.

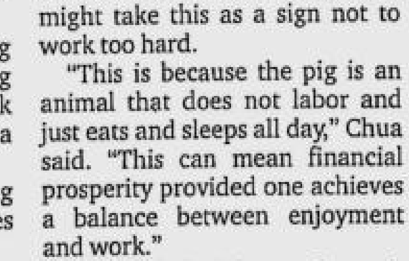
Pantaleon was a court witness in a homicide and frustrated homicide case which happened five months ago, also in Pinagbuhatan, Garcia said.

His testimony seemed to favor the suspect in the case, who was already out on bail, Garcia added. Police are investigating if the killing was connected to the previous case.



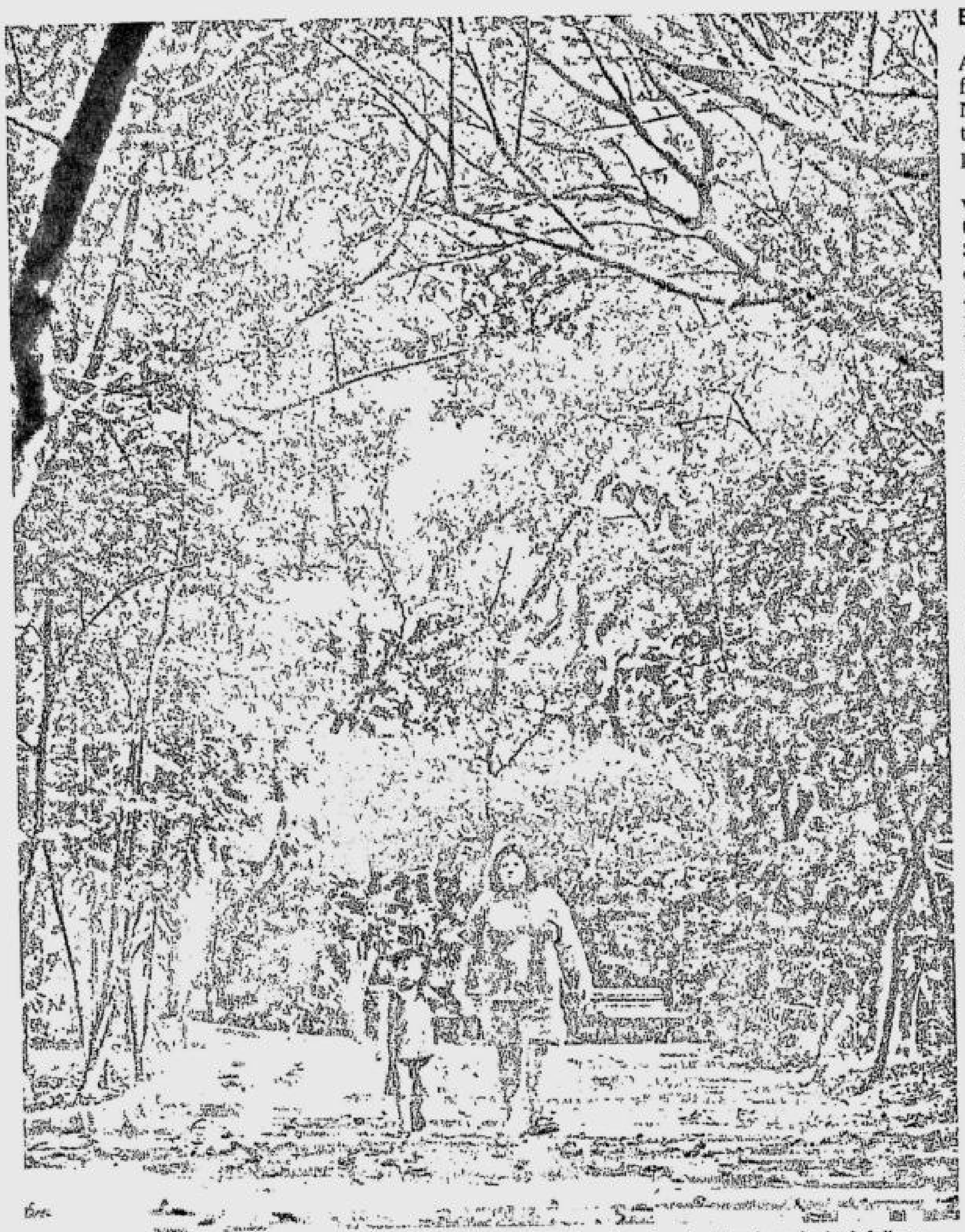
RARE, MEDIUM OR WELL DONE?
A restaurant located in UP Village, Quezon City that serves—what else but—steaks. ROGER CARPIO

DID YOU KNOW



THE MANILA HOTEL, which occupies 3.5 hectares on Roxas Boulevard, was built in 1912. Designed by Yale University graduate William Parsons, it has 570 deluxe rooms and suites and eight function rooms, including the Fiesta Pavilion ballroom which can hold 2,000 persons. The hotel has played host to presidents of various countries, political figures and international celebrities, including Gen. Douglas MacArthur who lived there for years. *Cyril L. Bonabente, Inquirer Research*

Displaced artists to set up easels in orphanage



MANILA'S Arroceros Forest Park used to be home to artists who drew inspiration from its lush foliage. But a dispute with City Hall forced them to look for a new home.

REM ZAMORA

By Tina G. Santos

ARTISTS WHO WERE DISPLACED from the Arroceros Forest Park in Manila have found a new venue for their sketching sessions at an orphanage in the city.

Starting this month, the artists will be setting up their easels at the grounds of the Hospicio de San Jose, an institution for abandoned children and the elderly on Ayala Bridge, according to Regina Paterno, president of Winner Foundation, an environment group and caretaker of the Arroceros park.

The artists used to draw inspiration from the lush foliage inside the park, visiting the place every weekend to paint its century-old trees, the Pasig River and visitors.

Still padlocked

However, for the past several months now, the artists and environment advocates were not allowed to enter the park as its gates remain padlocked even after the construction of the controversial two-story teachers' building inside the area.

Winner had opposed the construction of the building inside the park—which had also been declared an archaeological site—saying the move would result in the destruction of trees and foliage inside what it called Manila's "last lung."

"But they still wouldn't allow us inside even after the building was finished," Paterno said.

Affected

The artists lamented that their livelihood was likewise affected by the park's closure.

"We display our paintings to attract tourists to the beauty of the park. But now we have lost-even our potential buyers and supporters," a painter told the INQUIRER earlier.

Sales from artworks would likewise help Winner Foundation, the park's caretaker, raise funds to sustain the forest park, the artist added.

Although the artists claimed they were happy to have found the orphanage as a new place where they could work on their craft, they said they were still hoping that eventually, city officials would heed their pleas to allow them to go back to the forest park.

Paterno disclosed that she, along with other officers of the foundation, bumped into Manila Mayor Lito Atienza in a restaurant recently.

Describing their meeting as "cordial," Paterno said they asked the mayor if he could finally allow them inside the park.

"He said we needed to sit down first to discuss things, but we haven't heard from him since then," Paterno said.

Appeal

The group had earlier appealed to the city government to grant them access to the park so they could attend to the trees that were uprooted at the height of Typhoon "Milenyo" last September.

But Paterno claimed that they had been denied access to the park by security officers allegedly upon the orders of the authorities.

The Winner Foundation has been at loggerheads with the local government over the construction of the headquarters of the city school division on the property.

The foundation had filed a suit against the city government after the latter declared void the foundation's contract to develop the park.

The case remains pending in court.

METROBRIEFS

Kidnapping foiled

OPERATIVES of the Manila Police District (MPD) yesterday arrested a female beggar for allegedly abducting a 4-year-old girl in Pandacan, Manila. The suspect was identified as Mary Luna Tino, 38, of Catmon, Malabon City. According to Jess Reyes, chief of Barangay 397, Beata, Pandacan, the suspect was apprehended at around 11 a.m. on Lorenzo de la Paz Street. Reyes said a group of young men chanced upon the suspect dragging the girl away. One of them hit the suspect in the face, allowing the girl to escape. Apart from the victim's parents, the relatives of three girls allegedly abducted by female beggars a few months ago also filed a complaint against the suspect. Tino, however, denied the charges.

Margaux C. Ortiz

Calling all barkers

BARKERS or people who call out to passengers at loading areas for jeepneys and buses may soon be required to wear identification cards in Quezon City. The City Council has approved an ordinance regulating "barking" in the city and requiring barkers to register with the department of order and safety. Under the ordinance, all barkers will be issued an identification card that comes with a P75 fee. Principal author Restituto Malangen said the measure was intended to protect the public and regulate the operations of barkers to ensure order. To register, barkers will be asked to submit barangay and police clearance forms, community tax and health certificates, and an endorsement from a accredited public utility vehicle association.

DJ Yap

Pay before Jan. 20

PAY PROMPTLY and avoid the stiff penalties. The Makati government yesterday reminded establishment owners to pay their business taxes and renewal fees before Jan. 20 to avoid paying fines. Businessmen can go to the Business Permit and License Office (BPLO) at City Hall which resumed operations yesterday after the holiday break, the local government said in a statement. The BPLO will also be open on Saturday, Jan. 13 and Sunday, Jan. 14, from 8 a.m. to the time the last client has been attended to for the day.

Tarra V. Quismundo

Muntinlupa's daycare tutors now regular employees

By Jocelyn R. Uy

SIXTY-THREE DAYCARE TEACHERS in Muntinlupa City can expect happier days ahead after the local government decided to give them permanent teaching jobs this year.

For the past 33 years, daycare personnel have been working as temporary employees for the Muntinlupa government, according to Maricel Dacuycuy, head of the city's Early Childhood Education Division. Two years ago, they became contractual employees with a daily pay ranging from P346 to P349.

Dacuycuy said the city government took into careful consideration each of the 63 employees' length of service, performance, educational attainment and professional development before deciding to hire them permanently.

The move was approved by Mayor Jaime Fresnedi who wants to provide better quality education to toddlers and children, she added.

There are 6,000 students in Muntinlupa's 67 daycare centers. Two-hour classes are held at least four times a day with an average of 29 students each.

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Anger over Saddam taunting spills into streets

BAGHDAD—SUNNIS MUSLIMS, ANGERED by the execution of Saddam Hussein and the hurried and undignified way his hanging was carried out, have taken to the streets in recent days in mainly peaceful demonstrations in Sunni enclaves across the country.

Sunnis were not only outraged by Saddam's execution on Saturday, just four days after an appeals court upheld his conviction and sentence. Many were incensed by the unruly scene in the execution chamber, captured on video, in which Saddam was taunted with chants of "Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada."

The chants referred to Muqtada al-Sadr, a firebrand Shiite cleric who runs one of Iraq's most violent religious militias. He is a major power behind the government of Shiite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

The presence of Sadr's supporters among Saddam's executioners may fuel charges by Saddam's defense lawyers and his supporters among the once dominant Sunni Arab minority that the whole process has been "victors' justice."

Grainy footage of the execution, apparently shot on a mobile phone or other low-quality camera by a witness who was standing below looking up at the gallows, was circulating on the Internet on Sunday, a day after he was hanged for crimes against humanity.

The New York Times quoted witnesses as saying one of Saddam's masked guards shouted angrily just before the hanging:

"You have destroyed us. You have killed us. You have made us live in destitution."

Saddam answered: "I have saved you from destitution and misery and destroyed your enemies, the Persians and Americans."

The guard cursed him, saying "God damn you," according to The New York Times. Saddam replied "God damn you."

One video on the Internet, lasting about two-and-a-half minutes, shows Saddam drop through the trap door while still intoning the Muslim profession of faith. He was abruptly cut off in the second verse: "I bear witness that Mohammad ... " He was also shown hanging, with his eyes open. The film is punctuated by flashes, apparently as witnesses took photographs.

The new video bore out witness comments on Saturday that the 69-year-old former strongman, who looked calm and composed as he stood on the gallows in an official video broadcast on Saturday, had shouted angry political slogans while masked guards were bringing him into the execution chamber once used by his own feared intelligence services.

At one point a voice is heard shouting "Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada," a reference to Sadr, whose father Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr was murdered in 1999, probably by Saddam's agents. The New York Times said it was one of the guards who invoked Sadr's name.

On Monday, a crowd of Sunni mourners in Samarra marched to a bomb-damaged Shiite shrine and were allowed by guards and police to enter the holy place carrying a mock coffin and photos of the former dictator.

The protest took place at the Golden Dome, which was shattered in a bombing by Sunni extremists 10 months ago. *AP, Reuters*

A VIDEO grab taken from al-Iraqiya television shows ousted Iraq President Saddam Hussein moments before being hanged. AFP

Iraq gov't to probe filming of Saddam execution

BAGHDAD—THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT launched an inquiry on Monday into how guards filmed and taunted Saddam Hussein on the gallows, turning his execution into a televised spectacle that has inflamed sectarian anger.

News of the ousted strongman's death on Saturday and of his treatment by officials of the Shiite-led government was blamed by one witness for sparking a prison riot among mainly Sunni Arab inmates at a jail near the northern city of Mosul.

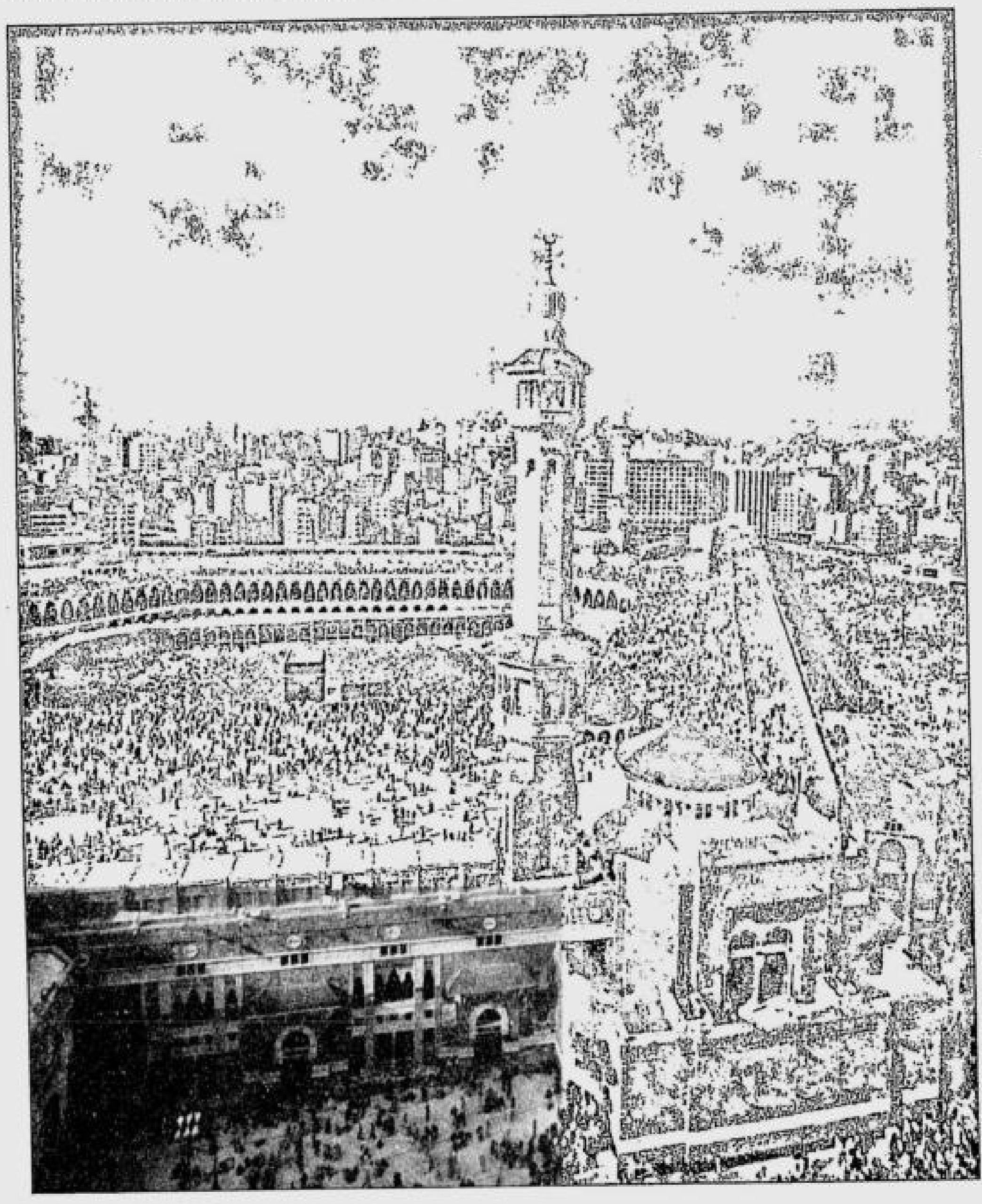
Sami al-Askari, an adviser to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, told Reuters: "There were a few guards who shouted slogans that were inappropriate and that's now the subject of a government investigation." The government released video showing the hangman talking to a composed Saddam as he placed the noose round his neck.

But mobile phone footage on the web showed guards shouting "Go to hell!," chanting the name of a Shiite militia leader and exchanging insults with Saddam before he fell through the trap in mid-prayer and his body swung, broken-necked, on the rope.

While Saddam's sentencing and then death brought muted responses from most Sunnis, many have been particularly angered by video showing supporters of Shiite cleric and militia leader Muqtada al-Sadr chanting "Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada!" at him.

"Is this what you call manhood?" Saddam told them in reply.

Askari said the government would look into how guards in the execution chamber, once used by Saddam's own feared secret police, had smuggled in a mobile phone camera. *Reuters*



FINAL RITUAL
Muslim pilgrims pray inside the Grand Mosque in Mecca Jan. 1. More than two million Muslim pilgrims pelted stones at symbols of the devil in the last of a sacred ritual on Monday amid tight security to avert stampedes during the haj pilgrimage. REUTERS

Somali gov't proclaims victory over Islamists

MOGADISHU—THE ETHIOPIA-backed Somali government said Tuesday it had wrested control of territories in the country's southern and central regions from Islamists, as a disarmament drive in the lawless capital Mogadishu looked doomed.

"The government has gained control of southern and central Somalia. We will ensure that we restore law and order in those parts of the country," information minister Ali Jama told AFP.

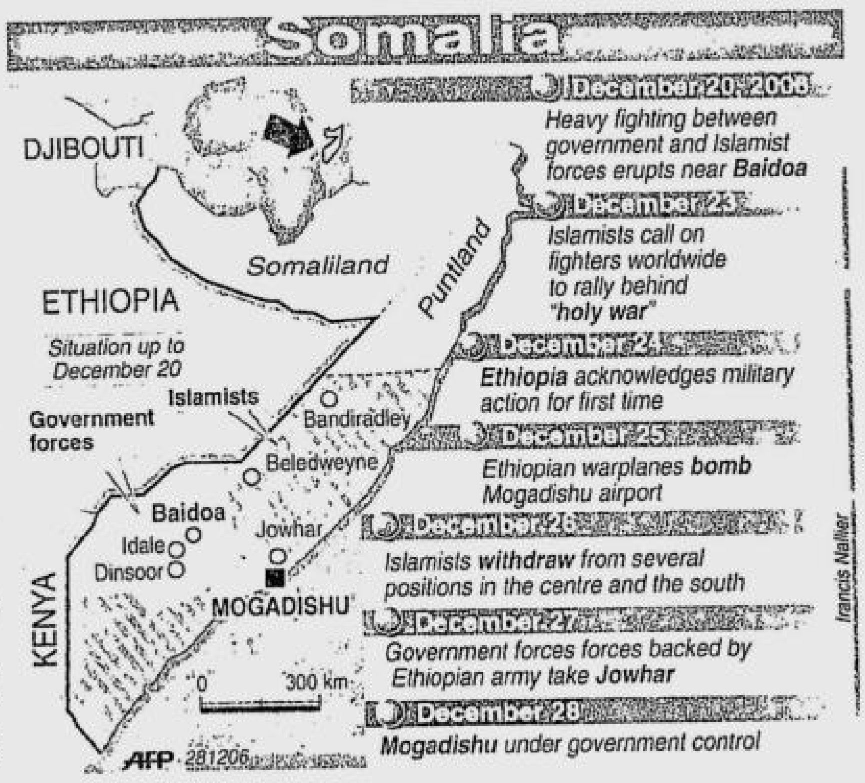
He said the government exerted control of the southern port town of Kismayo, the Islamists' last stronghold before they fled on the arrival of government troops backed by Ethiopian forces.

"We will pursue them (Islamists) until we ensure that they are out of this country," Jama said.

Officials said the Islamists were holed up in Ras Kamboni, a thick frontier forest, but Kenyan authorities boosted aerial and ground patrols to ensure they do not sneak over.

Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi said at least 11 Islamists fighters, including Eritreans, had been arrested by Kenyan authorities, but Nairobi said it had seized eight and was probing them to find out if they were fighters or refugees.

The Islamists, who are accused of links to al-Qaida, have conceded defeat after nearly two weeks of clashes, but vowed to carry on with a guerrilla war against the Somali troops and their Ethiopian backers.


Somalia
DJIBOUTI
Somaliland
Puntland
ETHIOPIA
Situation up to December 20
Islamists
Government forces
Bandiradley
Beledweyne
Baidoa
Idale
Dinsoor
Jowhar
MOGADISHU
KENYA
0
300 km
AFP 281206
December 20, 2006
Heavy fighting between government and Islamist forces erupts near Baidoa
December 23
Islamists call on fighters worldwide to rally behind "holy war"
December 24
Ethiopia acknowledges military action for first time
December 25
Ethiopian warplanes bomb Mogadishu airport
December 26
Islamists withdraw from several positions in the centre and the south
December 27
Government forces forces backed by Ethiopian army take Jowhar
December 28
Mogadishu under government control
Francis Nallier

Somalia disintegrated into lawlessness after the 1991 ousting of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. It was carved up among clan warlords, some of whom now back the government.

Gedi has announced measures to pacify the nation, notably a disarmament of civilians—scheduled to start Monday—and the relocation of his government from the regional outpost of Baidoa to Mogadishu.

Gedi vowed to forcefully disarm civilians if they refuse to do so on a voluntary basis within three days, but residents laughed the suggestion off, throwing the drive into jeopardy.

"My gun is my profession, I have nothing else to do. Anybody who needs the gun in my hand should give me money. Otherwise any attempt to get it by force will be disastrous," said Mohamed Emir Abdi, 22, a local militia, told AFP. *AFP*

Wild boars attack 4 in year of pig

TOKYO—FOUR JAPANESE needed no reminding that the year of the pig had arrived when they were attacked by wild boars in a rural city on New Year's Day.

The four, aged between 56 and 77, sustained slight leg or head injuries when three wild boars went on the rampage in a residential area in Yawatahama on the island of Shikoku on Monday afternoon, police said Tuesday.

"Some 15 local hunters tried to track down the boars after they went back into the mountains," a duty officer at the police station in Yawatahama, a seaside city of 41,000 people, said by telephone.

"They abandoned the hunt after a couple of hours and we alerted the citizens to be aware of boars by the public address system," he said.

The year of the pig, or more formally the boar, comes after the year of the dog in the 12-animal cycle in East Asian astrology.

According to the lunar calendar, the year of the pig will begin on Feb. 18. But Japan officially follows the solar calendar and its first day of the year of the pig was Jan. 1. *AFP*

Hezbollah sees no early end to Lebanon crisis

BEIRUT—LEBANON'S HEZBOLLAH-led opposition will decide this week how to press its campaign against the government and sees little chance of an early end to the standoff, the group's deputy leader said.

Sheikh Naim Kassem said late on Monday the opposition would meet in the next two days to agree on the next steps in its campaign, now focused on a demand for early parliamentary elections. He did not say what the opposition had in mind.

Opposition supporters have been camped out in central Beirut since Dec. 1 to demand the anti-Syrian government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora step down. Hezbollah, a group backed by Damascus and Tehran, says the campaign will remain peaceful.

"The opposition forces will sit together and assess what happened in the last month ... study ideas proposed in the arena—whether there are horizons for solutions or not," Kassem said in an interview with Hezbollah's al-Manar television station.

"Naturally, it has become clear that the horizons are not very open. Then (the opposition) will take a series of steps, actions," he said in the interview late on Monday.

Many Lebanese fear the crisis could turn violent. One anti-government protester has already been killed.

The protest has severely disrupted commercial life in downtown Beirut, where roads are closed and troops, armored vehicles and razor wire protect the government's headquarters.

The opposition initially called for veto power in cabinet but has raised its demands to early parliamentary elections.

It has declared as illegitimate Siniora's government, which came to office following the first parliamentary elections after the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005.

The anti-Syrian leaders who control government say the opposition is effectively trying to stage a coup which would lead to more Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon. *Reuters*

Past, future intricately connected in brain—study

CHICAGO—OUR ABILITY TO daydream about our future is closely related to our ability to recall our past, and may even depend on it, according to a study released Monday which may explain a little-known quirk of the amnesiac's condition.

The findings come from a small study in which researchers compared the brain activity of volunteers as they alternately reminisced about past personal events such as a birthday, or getting lost, and then conjured up images of similar scenarios in the future.

The brain scans of the 21 students who took part in the experiment revealed "a surprisingly complete overlap" in the brain regions used for both processes, the researchers said.

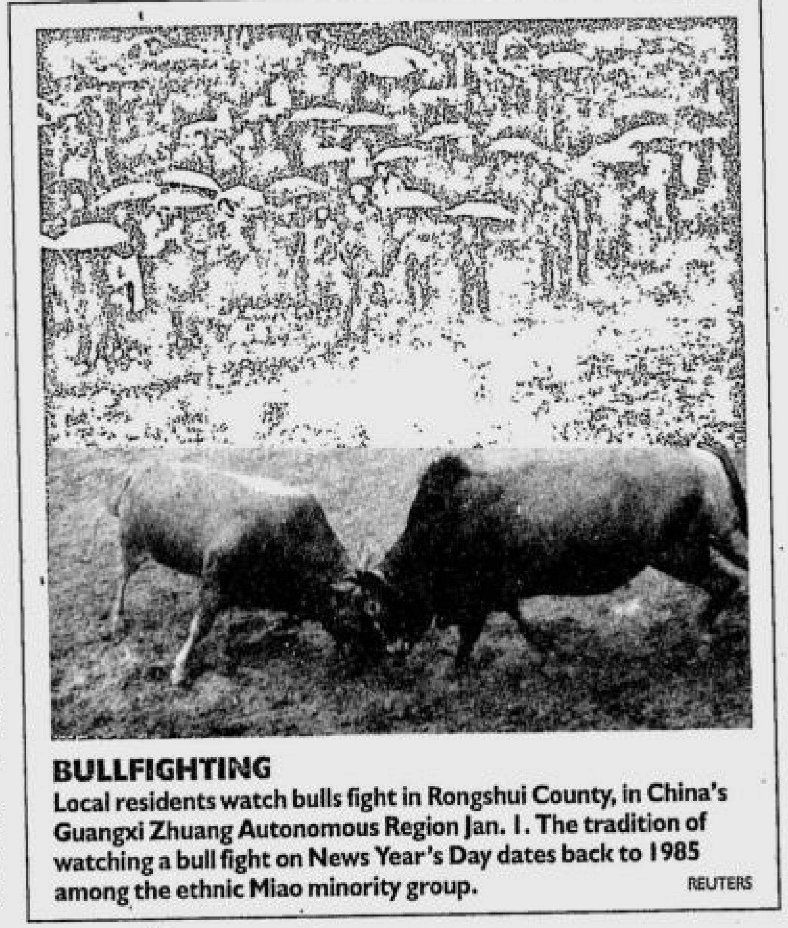
"Our findings provide compelling support for the idea that memory and future thought are highly interrelated and help explain why future thought may be impossible without memories," said Karl Szpunar, lead author of the study and a doctoral student in psychology at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

The phenomenon can be explained in part by the fact that the patterns of activity seen within those brain regions suggested that the visual and spatial context for the mental images of the future were borrowed from past experiences, especially memories of specific body movements, the researchers said.

Moreover, in post-testing questionnaires, the students said that they tended to place their "future" images in the context of familiar places (home and school) and familiar people (friends and family)—something that would require the reactivation of those images from neural networks responsible for the storage and retrieval of autobiographical memories.

The finding may explain why people with amnesia, a condition involving various degrees of memory loss, cannot vividly envision themselves in any kind of personal future, even though they can consider the future in an abstract sense, said Kathleen McDermott, a coauthor and professor of psychology in the School of Medicine at Washington University.

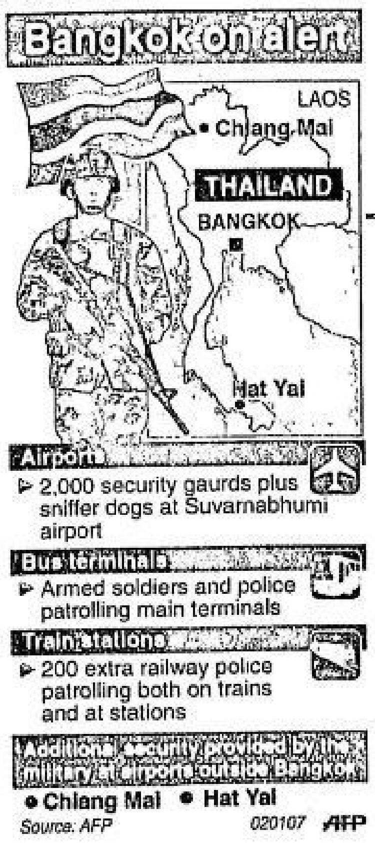
The study is published in the journal of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. *AFP*



BULLFIGHTING
Local residents watch bulls fight in Rongshui County, in China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Jan. 1. The tradition of watching a bull fight on News Year's Day dates back to 1985 among the ethnic Miao minority group. REUTERS

The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**


Bangkok on alert
LAOS
Chiang Mai
THAILAND
BANGKOK
Hat Yai
Airport
▶ 2,000 security gaurds plus sniffer dogs at Suvarnabhumi airport
Bus terminals
▶ Armed soldiers and police patrolling main terminals
Train stations
▶ 200 extra railway police patrolling both on trains and at stations
Additional security provided by the military at airports outside Bangkok
● Chiang Mai ● Hat Yai

Source: AFP 020107 AFP

Deadly Bangkok blasts blamed on Thaksin supporters

BANGKOK—SNIFFER DOGS and extra security forces patrolled transport hubs across Thailand Tuesday as thousands flooded back into Bangkok despite fears of a repeat of the deadly New Year bombings.

The military-backed government has beefed up security at bus terminals, train stations and airports as hundreds of thousands of people returned to the Thai capital after a four-day weekend for the New Year holiday.

Eight coordinated explosions in Bangkok on New Year's Eve killed three and injured 38, including nine foreign tourists, in the first violence in the capital since the September coup that toppled prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Coup leader, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, has blamed the blasts on politicians from Thaksin's government trying to destabilize the country, and summoned four of them to appear before the junta for questioning.

Thaksin, who is in exile in Beijing, has denied any involvement in the attacks.

Extra security forces and bomb-sniffing dogs were deployed at Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi Airport as well as at airports around the country, said Chotisak Asapaviriya, president of Airports of Thailand.

"We have implemented the highest level of security measures since early December at all airports across the country, and especially at Suvarnabhumi where we have currently deployed 2,000 security guards and bomb-sniffing dogs," he told AFP.

The military has helped provide additional security at other airports, notably in the northern city of Chiang Mai and the southern commercial center of Hat Yai.

Normally tranquil Chiang Mai was rattled by a small bomb attack at a mosque on Monday, while Hat Yai periodically suffers violence linked to an Islamic separatist insurgency in Muslim-majority provinces along the border with Malaysia.

Transport Company, which operates all of Thailand's inter-city bus stations, said armed soldiers and police were patrolling the main terminals around Bangkok.

"Security at all bus terminals is at 100 percent. We have also instructed terminal managers to carefully inspect all luggage, while security staff will search every bus," the company's acting president Wuthichart Kalyanamitra said.

Some 200,000 people are expected to arrive in Bangkok by bus on Tuesday, he said.

Another 120,000 people are expected to return to the capital by rail, said Monthakarn Srivilas, spokesperson for the State Railway of Thailand.

"We have sent out 200 extra railway police on top of our regular staff. They will patrol both on trains and at train stations. We will also be monitoring the stations on closed-circuit television, and have sent out bomb-sniffing dogs," she said. *AFP*

Indon passenger jet crashes; 90 killed

MAKASSAR, INDONESIA—RESCUE WORKERS Tuesday found 90 bodies and the twisted wreckage of a plane carrying 102 people which crashed into a remote Indonesian mountain, and said the other 12 may have survived.

The Adam Air plane with 96 passengers, including three Americans, and six crew on board slammed into a jungle-covered mountain on the west of the island of Sulawesi after vanishing off air traffic control radar screens Monday.

The Boeing 737-400 had sent distress signals an hour after taking off from Java island en route to Sulawesi, and an official said it had been flying too low.

It was the second transport disaster in Indonesia within a few days. Late Friday a ferry carrying 600 people sank off Java in an accident blamed on bad weather.

The plane wreckage was discovered in dense jungle at a height of about 350 to 500 meters, the head of the search and rescue team said in Makassar, capital of South Sulawesi, contradicting earlier reports that it crashed at about 2,600 meters.

"The plane has been completely destroyed after it crashed into the dense jungle," Muslimin told AFP.

"I was informed via radio by the local community that 90 people had died and 12 had survived but we do not know the details yet of who survived." He said the wreckage was about 20 kilometers from the town of Polewali, or 200 km north of Makassar.

Thick jungle was hampering access to the site, which was an eight-hour trek from Polewali, he said. The weather and arduous terrain were also complicating matters.

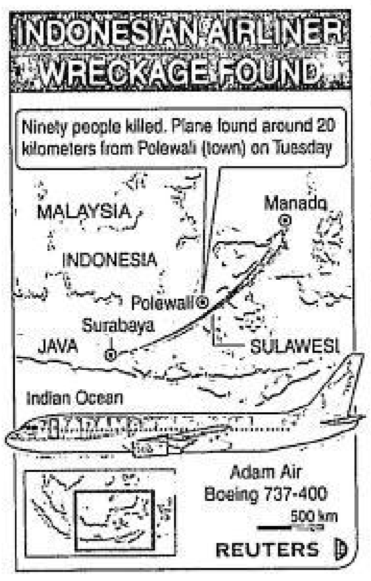
"It is raining heavily and we have lost contact with some people there," Muslimin said.

"We are sending more search and rescue teams out there by foot. We had earlier sent one team by helicopter but we could not see anything because of the heavy forest covering the area," he said.

"We have to clear the path as we walk there." National transportation safety commission chief Setio Rahardjo earlier said the wreckage was discovered at a height of 2,600 meters.

"The question is why was the plane flying at 8,000 feet—that is what we are trying to find out. The plane was supposed to be flying at 32,000 feet," Rahardjo said, according to the detikcom online news service.

Sulawesi is mostly mountainous rainforest, with peaks up to 3,450 meters and several active volcanoes.


INDONESIAN AIRLINER WRECKAGE FOUND
Ninety people killed. Plane found around 20 kilometers from Polewali (town) on Tuesday
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA
Manado
Polewali
Surabaya
JAVA
SULAWESI
Indian Ocean
Adam Air Boeing 737-400
500 km
REUTERS

The jet was carrying 85 adult passengers, 11 children, including four babies, and six crew when it crashed. Three Americans were among the passengers.

"There are three foreign citizens, all American from one family," Adam Air spokesperson Ali told AFP, naming them as Scott Jackson and daughters Stephanie and Lindsay.

It was not immediately clear if they were among the survivors.

The Adam Air plane took off Monday at 12:59 p.m. (0559 GMT) from Surabaya on Java bound for Manado in northeast Sulawesi, but sent distress signals and disappeared off radar screens just over an hour later, about halfway through the flight.

The Surabaya airport duty manager said there were no technical problems with the plane when it took off. Adam Air officials said the 17-year-old aircraft was last inspected on Dec. 25. *AFP*

AN UNIDENTIFIED relative of a passenger of a missing plane weeps as she waits for news at the airport in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, Jan. 2. AP

200 survive sinking of Indonesian ferry

REMBANG—AT LEAST 200 PEOple survived the sinking of an Indonesian ferry, the health ministry said on Monday, even as body bags were being prepared for victims and more than 400 remained unaccounted for.

Although confirmed deaths were in single digits, officials said corpses from the disaster overnight on Friday were scattered for miles on beaches along Java's coastline, and local media have reported at least 60 bodies found.

A survivor told Reuters he was surrounded by floating bodies after the sinking and many had also gone down with the ship.

At a hospital in Rembang in Central Java, Agung Subiarto, a medical team member, said: "We have prepared 100 body bags to anticipate the possibility of (receiving) dead bodies."

Anxious and exhausted-looking relatives of passengers on the ship sat in a field in front of the hospital or in a large tent the army provided as they waited to see if their family members were brought in alive or dead, a Reuters photographer said.

According to the manifest, the Senopati Nusantara ferry was carrying 628 people, including 57 crew.

The number of survivors was at least 200, according to Rustam Pakaya, head of the Health Ministry crisis center.

He told Reuters via text message that 130 survivors were in the East Java town of Tuban and 70 in Rembang.

Those numbers could go up as officials say some survivors have been picked up by ships headed for different ports and that life rafts with people aboard have been spotted but not reached.

Huge waves have hampered rescue operations.

Search and Rescue official Budiantoro, coordinating fishermen helping in the search, said rescuing survivors took precedence over recovering bodies.

"There is a report that (the fishermen) have found 53 bodies … but they prioritize helping the survivors so they have left the bodies where they are," he told Reuters.

Toni Syaiful, spokesperson for the navy's eastern fleet, said:

"We are having problems because the victims are spread all across the beaches from Jepara to Rembang to Tuban." The area he described stretches some 175 km long. *Reuters*

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GRAPHIC

Bush pays tribute to late President Gerald Ford

WASHINGTON—US PRESIDENT George W. Bush bowed his head beside the body of former president Gerald Ford Monday, bidding farewell to the man who led the country in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal more than three decades ago.

Bush, accompanied by his wife, First Lady Laura Bush, silently stood beside Ford's flag-draped casket, which has been lying in state at the Capitol Rotunda since Saturday.

Less than a minute later the two left without speaking.

Ford died in California on Dec. 26 at the age of 93, and his body will remain in the Rotunda until Tuesday's national memorial service. Ford will then be flown to his home state of Michigan for interment.

Earlier Monday, his children personally welcomed many of the public filing past the casket, shaking hands and exchanging greetings with well-wishers.

Vice President Dick Cheney, who served as Ford's chief of staff, delivered a speech Saturday evening hailing the former president for his most criticized decision—pardoning his predecessor Richard Nixon, who left office in disgrace over the Watergate scandal.

Cheney told mourners Ford "was almost alone in understanding that there can be no healing without pardon," and that he saved the country from division and disaster following Nixon's August 1974 resignation.

"It was this man, Gerald R. Ford, who led our republic safely through a crisis that could have turned to catastrophe," Cheney said.

In September 1974, Ford delivered an unconditional pardon for any crimes Nixon may have committed in the sweeping White House coverup of an illegal Republican spying operation against the Democratic party in 1972.

With Nixon facing impeachment after the coverup was exposed, his opponents viewed Ford's pardon as unjust, and speculated that a deal had been cut before Nixon resigned.

But Ford, who was never elected and served as president for just two years and four months, was also remembered for his humble manner and his reputation for honesty. "Few have ever risen so high with so little guile or calculation," Cheney said.

PRESIDENT and Ms Bush pause to pay their respects by the casket of former President Gerald Ford in the Capitol Rotunda on Capitol Hill in Washington, Jan. 1. AP

After finishing the eulogy, Cheney said a few words to former first lady Betty Ford before leading her over to the casket, where they were joined by the Ford children.

The series of solemn tributes to Ford will conclude with a national day of mourning on Tuesday and a service at Washington's National Cathedral. Bush is to speak and all of the living former presidents, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter and Bush's father George H.W. Bush, are to attend.

Apart from the crisis prompted by the Watergate scandal, Ford also inherited the final phase of US military involvement in Vietnam.

In an interview conducted before his death with the Washington Post but published for the first time Sunday, Ford recalled the US presence in Vietnam with regret. *AFP*

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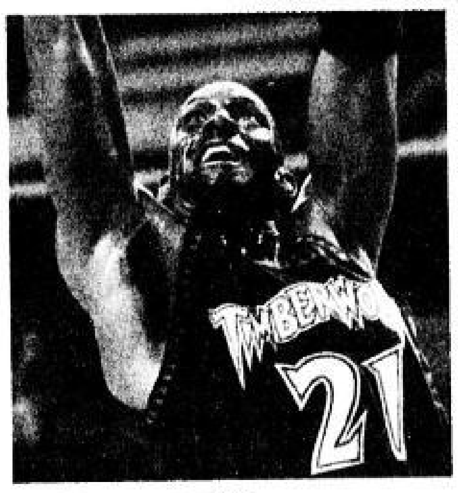
WHAT'S INSIDE



▨ **Garnett likes** leather, paces Timberwolves/A23

▨ **Russia repulses** struggling US/A23

▨ **Mamiit,** Taino answer SEAG call of duty /A24

Giants, Realtors dispute last q'final berth

By Musong R. Castillo

GAME TODAY
(*Cuneta Astrodome*)
7 p.m.—Purefoods
vs. Sta. Lucia

THE PUREFOODS CHUNKEE and the Sta. Lucia Realtors will be coming out of the holiday break not feeling like winners at all.

The two squads slug it out tonight at the Cuneta Astrodome with the victor getting back on track and the vanquished faced with more hard work to get into the Talk 'N Text Philippine Cup playoffs.

The defending champion Chunkee Giants and the once-streaking Realtors, who both gave away clear shots at automatic semifinal berths, clash at 7 p.m.

"We are still upbeat, despite the circumstances," Purefoods coach Ryan Gregorio told the INQUIRER yesterday. "We worked hard through the holiday season, there was practically no time off for us."

Both teams suffered losing streaks in critical points of the tournament, with the Giants losing their last two games and the Realtors dropping six of their last eight.

After tonight, the winner will join Red Bull and Talk 'N Text in the quarterfinals while the loser will fall into the wild-card phase.

"The good thing about this game is that we hold our fate in our hands," said Gregorio, whose Giants finished the eliminations with 10-8 cards like the Realtors.

Gregorio, already the winner of two PBA titles with Purefoods, admitted to feeling sore after the Phone Pals humbled the Barangay Ginebra Gin Kings on Christmas Day, which necessitated tonight's KO game.

"I told the boys after that, 'If we cannot chart our destiny, then who will?'" said Gregorio. "That game is behind us now. We weren't expecting free rides to begin with.

"We'll come out hard (tonight) and play for our own destiny."

Purefoods will focus its offense anew on Kerby Raymundo and James Yap, its 1-2 punch who disputed the Most Valuable Player award last year, with the defense to be anchored on the hard-nosed pair of Marc Pingris and Roger Yap.

"It's no secret who we will go to," Gregorio said. "They (Raymundo and Yap) have gotten us this far and we are not about to change that."

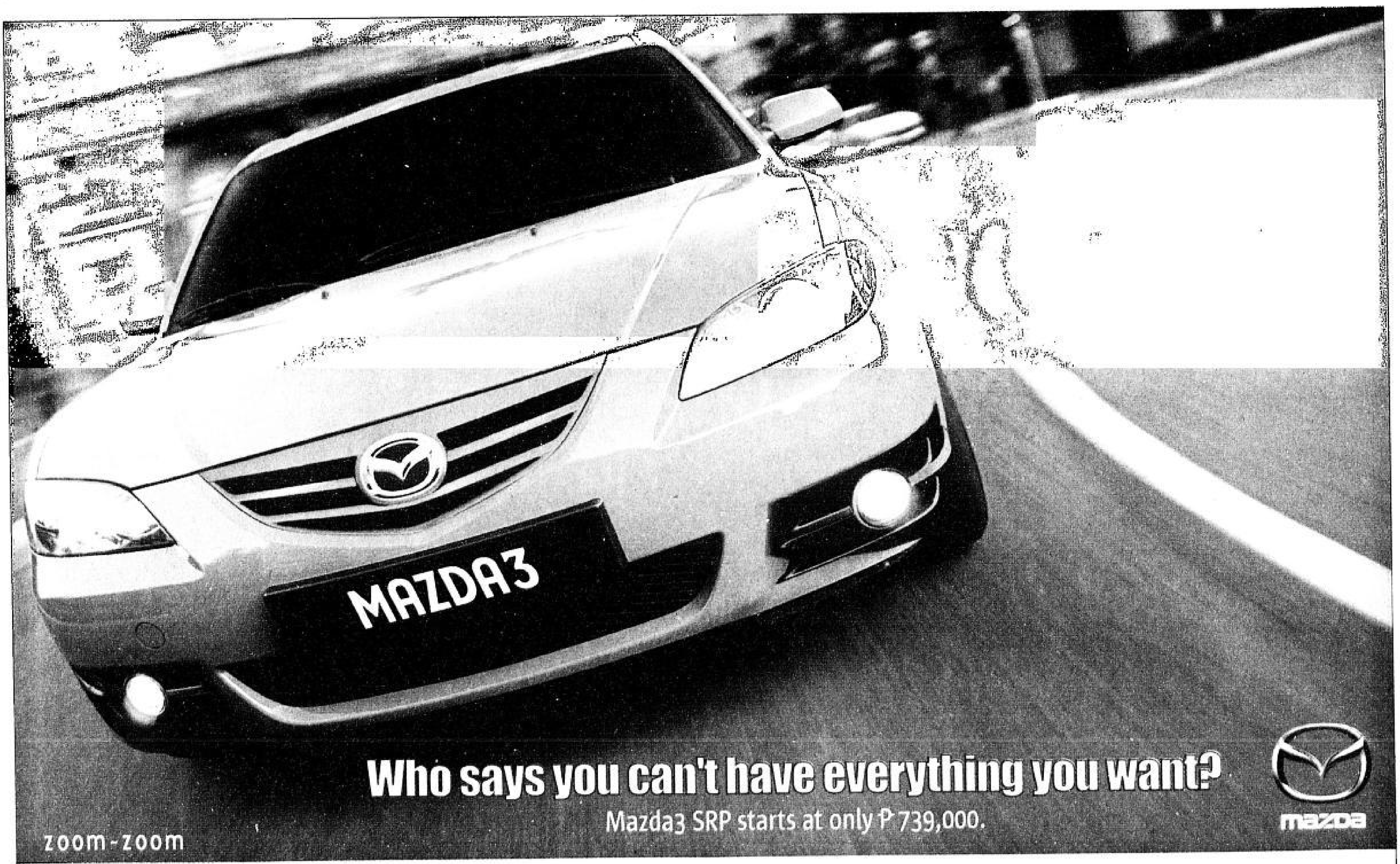
Sta. Lucia, on the other hand, still has its array of stars that was bolstered by the arrival of super rookie Kelly Williams.

Dennis Espino, Marlou Aquino and former MVP Kenneth Duremdes will again play major roles for the Realtors, who have not won a title since 2001, when Damien Owens reinforced them against San Miguel in the Second Conference.

Ginebra and San Miguel Beer are already in the semifinals. The quarterfinals will see Red Bull slugging it out with the winner of the wild-card match between Talk 'N Text and the victor tonight.

Coca-Cola, Air21 and pre-season champion Alaska are in the wild card, which will be a single-round affair.

TOGETHER with James Yap and Kerby Raymundo, Richard Yee (above) is expected to carry the load tonight for Purefoods. RAFFY LERMA



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What's certain for 2007

BARE EYE

Recab Trinidad

ONE TEXT MESSAGE WARNS: NEVER to get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you.

That, it was sincerely suggested, should be one of our New Year's resolutions.

Thank you, Tino.

So, you think we've witnessed enough bedlam close to midnight Sunday as 2007 was welcomed here in wild, wild abandon?

There were those who said there were lesser fireworks to usher in the New Year.

Less noisy, but it depends on how you savored the ham and the revelry; or where you stood amazed as revelers tried to tear the city apart with assorted explosives and pyrotechnics.

* * *

There definitely were more trash, in stinking heaps and mounds, with our streets all resembling a garbage dump the morning after.

For a fact, our overworked, underpaid street-sweepers have every reason to protest.

They continue to labor tirelessly among dazed citizens that have mercilessly forgotten to use the garbage can.

They also continue to be ruled by lazy, lardy leaders who have conveniently forgotten that it was their main task to see that ordinances are solemnly followed and respected.

* * *

Sad to say, what these poor street cleaners had to do at the start of the year could be nothing more than a rehearsal.

Yes, there definitely would be record dirt and disorder, not to mention overwhelming graft and filth, when they mount the 2007 Philippine elections.

There will be a total breakdown of regulations, vulgar political posters covering all available spaces, and violence also expected to ford new heights in the run-up to the polls and thereafter.

The motto of our elections would again be: The dirtier the merrier.

There will be no counting the injuries, but there certainly will be more killings.

This early, it's safe to predict the 2007 elections will be the year's top political story hereabouts.

* * *

Meanwhile, out there on the sports front, Manny Pacquiao, celebrated two-fisted fighter and negotiator, could earn record purses.

Unfortunately, there's the danger of him gradually losing respect, not only here at home but abroad as well, with his wanton renouncement of formal contracts.

Pacquiao did call for national unity in his New Year message.

Of course, the boxing hero should honestly put his greatness to work by setting examples on how to foster unity.

He could, in fact, be an agent of renewal by selling character change the way he has helped advertise assorted products, from world-class beer to cheap vinegar.

Pacquiao showed the makings of a dirty politician by refusing to honor what he had formally agreed with the promotions group of Oscar de la Hoya.

At least, there's no strong likelihood Pacquiao would throw his hat and mess up the Philippine political arena this year.

Not yet, anyway.

PSC to seek billionaires' aid for Olympic gold bid

By June Navarro

LUCIO TAN. HENRY SY JR. JAIME AUGUSTO Zobel de Ayala.

They are three of the country's billionaires and rank among the world's richest businessmen, according to Forbes magazine in 2006.

They also happen to be on top of the Philippine Sports Commission's list of possible supporters.

PSC chair William "Butch" Ramirez said he will lobby for the support of the wealthiest Filipino businessmen in a bid to boost the country's chances of nailing the elusive gold medal in the Olympics.

"Spread the good news to businessmen in the Philippines who are earning so much," said Ramirez, referring to the country's top businessmen who made it to Forbes' annual list of the world's billionaires.

Tan, who owns Tanduay Holdings, Fortune Tobacco and Asia Brewery, is the Philippines' wealthiest and ranks 451st among the world's 793 billionaires, according to Forbes.

With 300 companies under his control, including Philippine Airlines, Tan has a net worth of US$1.7 billion (about P83.3 billion).

Sy, the king of shopping malls, owns SM Investment Corp. which has 23 malls nationwide. He ranks 512th in the world with a net worth of $1.5 billion.

Third on the list of richest men in the Philippines is Zobel de Ayala, who ranks 606th and has a net worth of $1.3 billion.

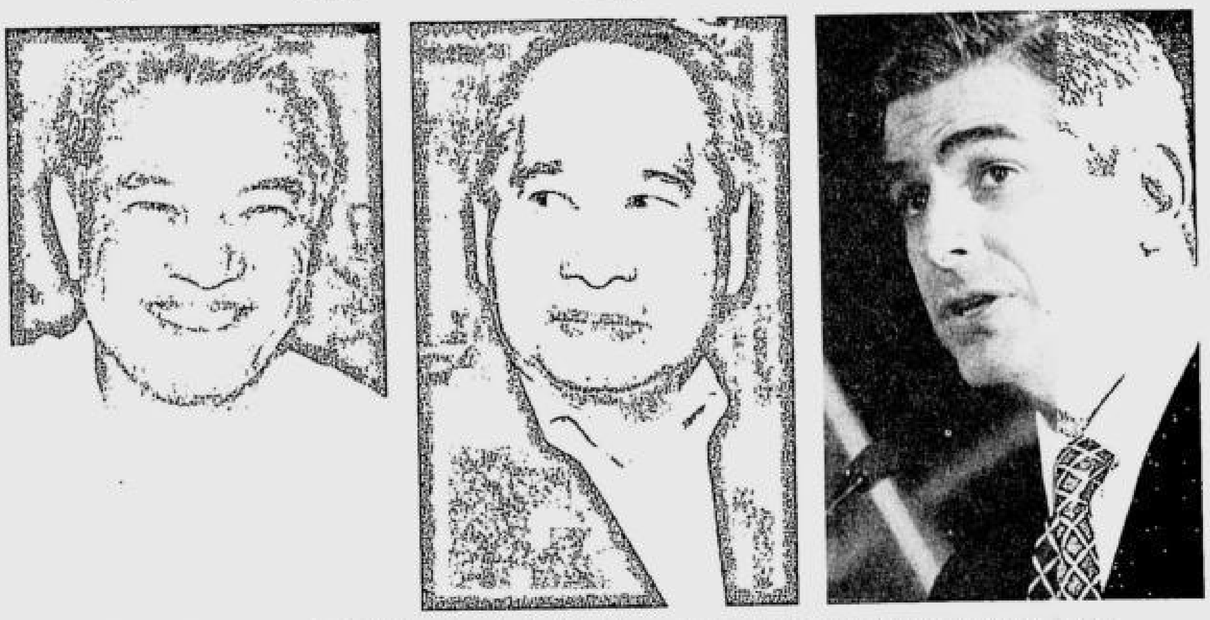
"Public opinion is very important, as well as patriotism," said Ramirez. "*Sana balikan naman nila ang bayan* (I hope they give something back to the country) through sports."

The PSC chief said the Filipino billionaires could help bankroll a long-term program being mapped out by the government sports agency and the Philippine Olympic Committee.

First Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo had earlier promised to help the needs of the athletes who will be picked by the POC and PSC to train overseas for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Other than Arroyo's commitment, sport leaders will have to find consistent godfathers for Philippine sports to sustain its programs even after the Olympics.

"I believe that one of the greatest, if not the most effective, way to unite the country is through sports and it has been proven," said Ramirez. "These people (billionaires) could help make it happen."



THEY COULD HELP: From left, billionaires Lucio Tan, Henry Sy Jr. and Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala.

FM Pimentel Singapore tilt co-champion

By Christian Irl Tan, *Inquirer Visayas*

BACOLOD CITY—FIDE MASTER JOEL Pimentel finished in a tie for the boys' Under-15 title in the recent 2nd Asian Schools Chess Festival Age-Group Tournament at the Plaza Park Royal in Singapore.

Pimentel, who hails from Bacolod City, scored 6.5 points in seven rounds and shared the championship with FM Anas Nazreen Bakri of Malaysia in 12-nation competition.

It was the second international crown last year for Pimentel, who also topped the under-14 division of the ASEAN Age-Group Chess Championships in Jakarta in June.

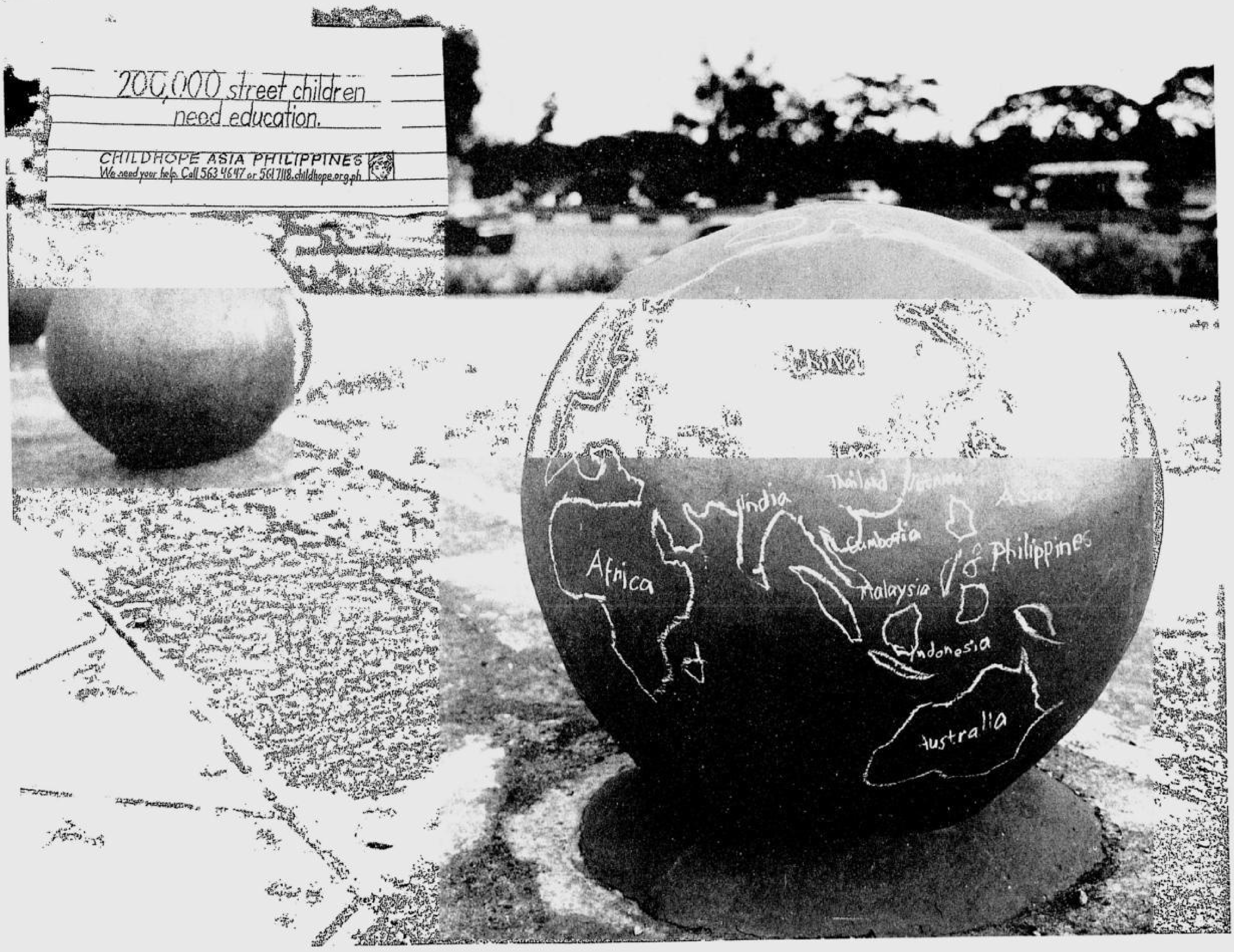
Pimentel, a chess prodigy at Bata National High School before taking up scholarships at the University of St. La Salle and La Salle Green Hills, was also a member of the RP team that brought home a silver medal in the Singapore tourney.

Joining Pimentel, who was supported by former USLS president Bro. Rolly Dizon, in the team event were fellow LSGH standouts Mikee Ramos, Miguel Lahoz and Rhett Matugas.

Coach Jesse Sanchez said their goal is to produce a first-ever Negrense Grandmaster and International Master in the future.

Another Negrense, National Master Hamed Nouri is currently seeing action in the Singapore Open and Challengers Chess Tournament.

The 28-year-old Nouri, who hails from Escalante City, emerged as the most successful Filipino campaigner in November's 1st President GMA Cup International Open by finishing in the Top 10.



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Mercurial Knight gets all-time win record

KNIGHT: 880th win

LUBBOCK, TEXAS—Bob Knight, known for his on-court tirades and jousts with sports writers as much as his achievements, earned his 880th career victory to become the most successful coach in American college basketball history on Monday when his Texas Tech Red Raiders beat New Mexico, 70-68.

Texas Tech led by as much as 20 points but survived a last-second 3-point attempt to enable Knight to pass Dean Smith.

Pat Smith, Knight's son and successor-in-waiting, put an arm around his dad's neck as they walked to shake hands with New Mexico coach Ritchie McKay.

The crowd already was on its feet and the cheers turned louder. Knight did a television interview, then "My Way" by Frank Sinatra blared, a not-so-subtle reminder of Knight's personal and professional credo.

Soon, red confetti fell and a ceremony began. A series of video tributes were shown, with former player and assistant Mike Krzyzewski of Duke saying, "You are the best there's ever been. I'm so glad you've been my mentor. You've been my coach and you've been my friend."

Already a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame, Knight's overall record is 880-354 with three US championships, including a perfect season in 1976 with Indiana University that has yet to be duplicated.

Of course, he's just as well-known for his run-ins with players, bosses, officials and others. He was convicted in absentia for punching a policeman in Puerto Rico during the 1979 Pan American Games and sent a chair tumbling across a court in protest of a referee's call.

The 66-year-old Knight began his career at the US Military Academy from 1965-71 then moved to Indiana, where he won his three college titles and was fired from in 2000 for a pattern of "unacceptable behavior."

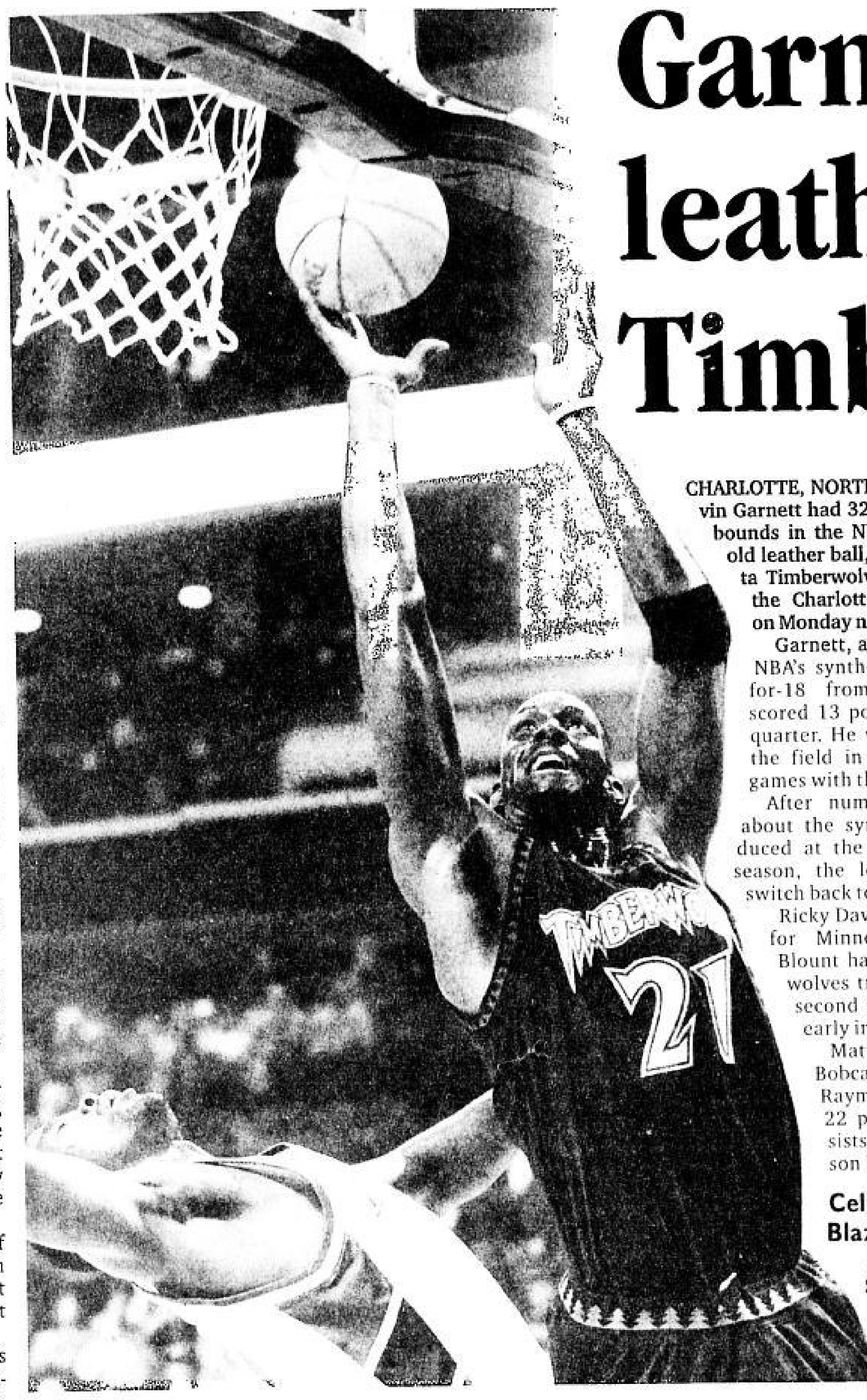
After 662 career victories at Indiana, he was hired by Texas Tech a year later.

"I've always thought if there was ever an occasion when a song should be played on my behalf, I wanted it to be Frank Sinatra singing 'My Way'," Knight, 66, told a news conference.

"Because I don't expect you people to have agreed with what I've done and if I did I would have asked your opinion. I have never asked the opinions of very many.

"I've simply tried to do what I think is best in the way that I think you have to do it to do what's best. *AP, Reuters*

Garnett likes leather, paces Timberwolves



GARNETT shoots over Bobcats forward Emeka Okafor.

REUTERS

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA—Kevin Garnett had 32 points and 14 rebounds in the NBA's return to the old leather ball, and the Minnesota Timberwolves rallied to beat the Charlotte Bobcats 102-96 on Monday night.

Garnett, a vocal critic of the NBA's synthetic ball, was 12-for-18 from the field and scored 13 points in the fourth quarter. He was 9-for-29 from the field in his previous two games with the synthetic ball.

After numerous complaints about the synthetic ball introduced at the beginning of the season, the league decided to switch back to the old ball.

Ricky Davis added 25 points for Minnesota, and Mark Blount had 21. The Timberwolves trailed by 20 in the second quarter and by 12 early in the fourth.

Matt Carroll led the Bobcats with 23 points. Raymond Felton added 22 points and nine assists, and Adam Morrison had 18 points.

Celtics 89, Trail Blazers 81

At Portland, Oregon, Tony Allen had 22 points and eight rebounds and Boston ended a six-game slide with the victory over Portland.

Ryan Gomes had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Celtics, who concluded a five-game road trip. Al Jefferson added 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Wally Szczerbiak had 15 points.

Rookie Brandon Roy had 18 points to lead Portland, and Ime Udoka and Martell Webster had 11 points apiece. Zach Randolph had 10 rebounds and nine points on 4-for-11 shooting. Portland has lost five of its last six games.

No ill feelings

On Tuesday, the Philadelphia 76ers will get their first taste of taking on Allen Iverson as an opponent when they visit the Denver Nuggets.

The Iverson era in Philadelphia came to a close after 11 years last month when the prolific scorer was traded.

"Very obviously, it's going to be different," said 76ers coach Maurice Cheeks.

It was Cheeks who informed Iverson in early December that he needn't plan on making an upcoming road trip with the team.

Iverson had expressed his unhappiness with the direction the team was taking, but Cheeks declined to say what exactly passed between them in the days leading up to Iverson's departure for Denver.

"You don't like to see things go bad, but it's a coach-player relationship," Cheeks said. "I respect the guy a great deal. I have no hard feelings toward him. I wish him a lot of success except (Tuesday night).

"But I have no ill feelings against him at all. I still respect him as a player and a person." *AP, AFP*

Injured Shaq may return soon

MIAMI—MIAMI'S SUPERSTAR CENTER Shaquille O'Neal is ahead of schedule in his rehabilitation from knee surgery and could return for a Jan. 15 clash with his former National Basketball Association team, the Lakers.

"He's ahead of schedule," Heat coach Pat Riley said Monday after the team's practice.

"He has been on the bike and the treadmill. He has really worked to be ready, and now the test is when he starts to pound up and down the court. But now, we're in the stage of 'He's back. Thank you God.'"

Miami have lost 15 of 26 games this season without O'Neal, who hurt the knee on Nov. 2 in a collision with New Jersey Nets forward Bostjan Nachbar.

Same knee

The 34-year-old re-injured the same knee on Nov. 12, and had surgery to repair torn cartilage on Nov. 19. O'Neal said he was eager to return, but wouldn't do so prematurely.

"I'm feeling real good now, but I haven't jumped or run yet," O'Neal said.

"I want to get my basketball conditioning back as quick as possible. I probably need another couple of practices. It's no use for me to come back less than 100 percent."

He said he didn't feel pressure to return in time for the Lakers game, despite a well-publicized exchange of barbs with Lakers coach Phil Jackson that accompanied their Christmas Day contest.

Jackson said before the game that O'Neal was "the only one" among the great players he has coached who "didn't like to work."

O'Neal responded by referring to his former coach as "Benedict Arnold."

"I'm not really worried about any individual game," O'Neal said. "Individual games at this point of the season really don't mean much." *AFP*

O'NEAL: Ahead of schedule

HARKLEROAD plays a double backhand to Petrova.

AFP

Russians repulse struggling Yanks

PERTH, AUSTRALIA—NADIA PETROVA and California-based Dmitry Tursunov beat Ashley Harkleroad and Mardy Fish, 6-3, 7-5, Tuesday to give Russia a 2-1 win over the United States at the Hopman Cup team tennis tournament.

Russia moves to 1-1 in Group A while the defending champion Americans are 0-2 after an opening loss to France.

France will try to improve to 2-0 with a later match Tuesday against Australia, which beat Russia in its first match Saturday.

Fish beat Tursunov, who moved to the United States from Russia with his family when he was 12, 6-1, 6-4 Tuesday. Fish had 13 aces, including four in a row to clinch the first set.

Fish also had four aces in a row in the 10th game of the second set to save four break points.

Petrova earlier defeated Harkleroad, 6-3, 6-0, to give Russia a 1-0 lead.

The highlight of the mixed doubles match was Tursunov's acrobatic over-the-shoulder smash volley in the final game, which Fish said was the luckiest shot he had ever seen.

Tursunov disagreed with Fish's assessment.

"Apparently it is called a lucky shot, but I can do that all day," Tursunov said. "You have no idea how many times I have practiced that." *AP*

No Tiger in Hawaii good news for Appleby

LOS ANGELES—IN THE ABSENCE of Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson and Ernie Els, Australia's Stuart Appleby has a golden opportunity to win a rare fourth successive title at this week's Mercedes-Benz Championship in Hawaii.

Appleby completed a record-equaling hat-trick of victories in the PGA Tour's season-opening event at the Kapalua Resort when he edged out Fijian Vijay Singh in a playoff last year.

That put him level with American Gene Littler, who claimed the title at Desert Inn Country Club in Las Vegas from 1955 to 1957 when the event was named the Tournament of Champions.

Although Appleby knows Kapalua's undulating, par-73 Plantation Course as well as anyone in the 34-strong field, he is taking nothing for granted.

"I don't feel like this is my home course or anything," the 35-year-old told reporters.

Should the Australian succeed this week, he would become the first player since Woods (at the 2003 Bay Hill Invitational) to win a PGA Tour event four years in a row.

World number one Woods, champion at Kapalua in 2000, decided last week to skip the event which brings together all the title-holders from the previous PGA Tour season. *Reuters*

Denver cornerback slain

DENVER, COLORADO—A PLAYER FOR THE DENver Broncos National Football League team was shot dead early Monday as he rode in a stretch Hummer limousine here, the team and police announced.

"Denver Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams was shot and killed early Monday morning," the team said in a statement.

Police spokesman Sonny Jackson said that there was "some type of disagreement" at a nightclub and Williams, 24, left the party with his friends.

Shortly afterward, a white sport-utility vehicle pulled alongside the limo. Shots were fired and Williams and two friends, a man and a woman, were hit, Jackson said.

Televised images showed Williams' white stretch limousine riddled with bullet holes.

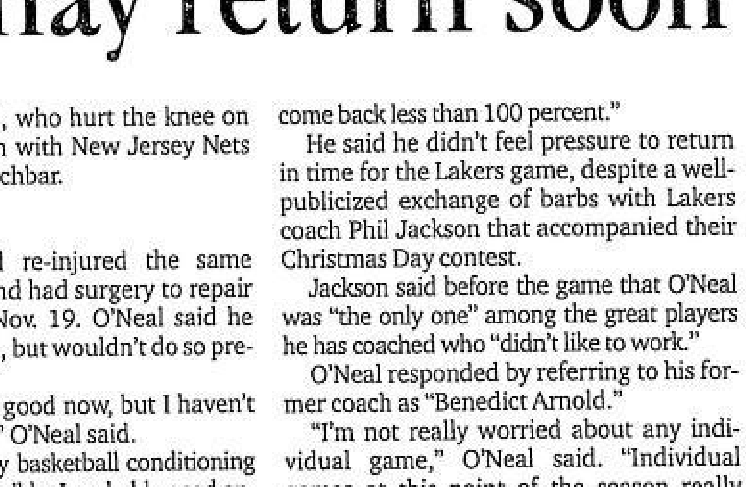
"All three were taken to the hospital. Mr. Williams was taken to Denver Health Medical Center where he was pronounced dead a little after 2:30 this morning," Jackson told reporters. Police are still looking for the SUV.

In New York, Kemal Kolenovic, a middleweight boxer who emigrated from Montenegro, was killed outside a Bronx bar when he was struck by a car that drove onto the sidewalk, police and witnesses said.

The 28-year-old fighter was pronounced dead at St. Barnabas Hospital, police said.

Kolenovic was at a restaurant at 4 a.m. Sunday when several other men got into an argument about their native Eastern Europe.

Kolenovic followed the men outside. According to his uncle, Kolenovic was trying to placate the other men. *AFP, AP*



MILLION-PESO WINNER: Philippine Poker Tour chair Rey Gamboa (right) awards the P1-million grand prize and the champions bracelet to Chris Parker who ruled the recent PPT Million-Peso Hold-Em Poker Championship. At left is Philippine Amusements and Gaming Corp. (Pagcor) tournament director Emy Mungcal.

Cardinals coach Green sacked

TEMPE, ARIZONA—THE ARIZONA Cardinals sacked coach Dennis Green Monday, one day after the completion of another disappointing National Football League season.

Arizona fell 27-20 to playoff-bound San Diego on Sunday, completing their second straight 5-11 season.

In three seasons under Green the team had a collective win-loss record of 16-32.

Green was the seventh coach the Cardinals since the franchise moved to the desert in 1988. He had one-year remaining on his original four-year, $10-million contract.

In a season where an 8-8 team earned an NFC playoff berth, the Cardinals again missed the postseason. They haven't reached the playoffs since 1998. *AFP*

Mamiit, Taino answer SEAG call

TWO ACES: Cecil Mamiit (left) and Eric Taino.

By Marc Anthony Reyes

CECIL MAMIIT AND ERIC TAINO, Filipino-Americans who breathed life into Philippine tennis the past two years, have agreed to don the country's colors again in the 24th Southeast Asian Games in Thailand and the Davis Cup ties this year.

Mamiit and Taino, both 29, won a pair of bronze medals at the recent 15th Asian Games in Doha, Qatar—the country's first Asiad mints in four decades.

Officials of the Philippine Tennis Association (Philta) yesterday said the United States-based netters will arrive next month to prepare for the Davis Cup Group 2 tie with powerhouse Pakistan at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center in Manila.

Ajay Pathak, Philta vice president for external affairs, expects the Pakistan—the group's top seeds—to be a tough nut to crack for the Filipinos, who won promotion to Group 2 after sweeping the Group 3 ties last year at the Manila Polo Club.

"They have also confirmed their participation in the Thailand SEA Games," Pathak told the INQUIRER in an overseas call from Bangkok. "They are only happy to play for the country."

Mamiit and Taino, both campaigners in the ATP Challengers' Tour, used their experience to land medals in Doha.

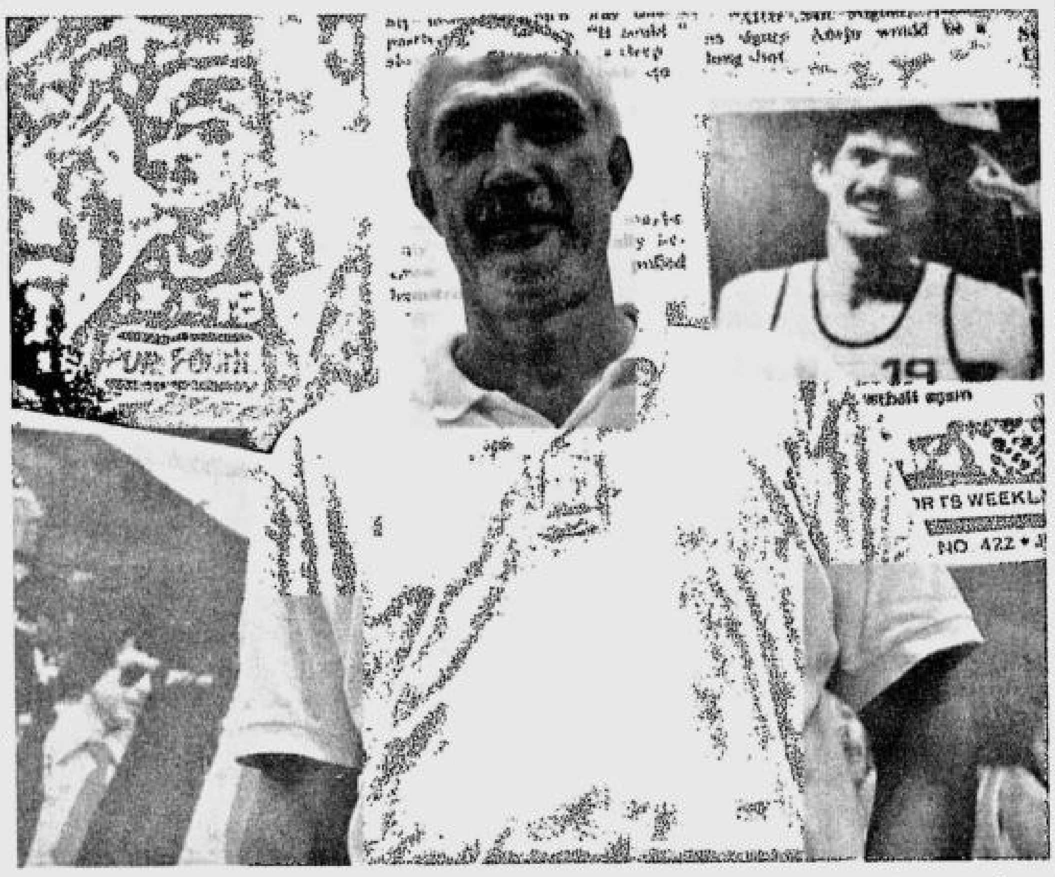
Mamiit nailed the bronze in singles and then teamed with Mamiit for the men's doubles bronze.

The last time the Philippines won Asian Games medals was in 1966 in Bangkok, where the men's and women's squads led by Jess Hernandez bagged two silver and three bronze medals.

Mamiit and Taino will be joined in the Davis Cup tie by Patrick John Tierro and Johnny Arcilla.

Pathak said the Fil-Am pair are also keen to improve on the country's three-gold haul—two by Mamiit—in the 2005 Manila SEAG.

I've done my best, I've left my legacy— El Presidente



SNAPSHOT MEMORIES: For four-time PBA MVP Mon Fernandez, the new year is a step closer to fully enjoying the fruits of his colorful basketball career.

By Francis Ochoa

CEBU CITY—WITH EACH PASSING NEW YEAR, RAMON FERNANDEZ takes a step farther from the career that has made him an iconic figure in Philippine basketball.

The images in his mind take on a hazier version of blur, the screams of the crowd dissolve closer and closer into silence and all he has left are snapshot memories of the highlights—and low points —of a life that seems so distant now.

"Sometimes, I find it hard to remember specific details of the championships the teams I played for won," said the 6-foot-4 beanpole who blazed the trail for all-around players who possess every bit of basketball skill needed to survive the professional game.

People remember him, though. And a lot of oldtimers can still recount the heroics Fernandez pulled off to weave his name into local basketball lore. After all, he is one of the only two men to have won the Philippine Basketball Association's Most Valuable Player award four times.

Four trophies

And Fernandez can still recount how important each trophy was to him.

1982: "I had been playing in the league for seven years already but the closest I ever came to winning the MVP was in 1979 when I was among the top contenders. When I lost, I just told myself it wasn't time. Three years later, I finally won it and winning it for the first time is always special."

1984: "I was really dominating the league that year. I felt like I was at the top of the game. There was one conference when I was a few assists shy of finishing the tournament with a triple-double average."

1986: "Winning a championship with Tanduay was always special because it was the first for that franchise. So winning the MVP while playing for that team was special, too."

1988: "That was for vindication."

Deflecting accusations

Fernandez still switches into a more somber tone when reflecting on the 1988 season because it was a roller-coaster year that saw him deflecting accusations of game-fixing and winning the MVP trophy for the fourth time.

"I really felt bad about those accusations because I felt that certain people who had something personal against me used them to ruin my name," said Fernandez.

Except for a few polite denials in paper, Fernandez really never raised a ruckus about the accusations, waiting instead for the National Bureau of Investigation to finish looking into the case. The NBI eventually cleared him.

On the court, though, he poured everything out. After Purefoods, whose top honchos accused him of rigging game results and traded him to San Miguel prior to the year's last tournament, Fernandez put on a show, leading the Beermen to the third conference title.

"Whatever frustrations I had off the court, I used my performance on the court to prove myself," he said.

His four MVPs were a testament to his dedication to improve every aspect of the game. But one thing that he really worked on was getting his teammates involved in the game, turning himself into the best passing big man the PBA has ever seen.

> 'Whatever frustrations I had off the court, I used my performance on the court to prove myself'
> — Mon Fernandez

Product of teamwork

"I always felt that getting teammates involved, making them feel that they were part of the success of the team, was the fastest way to win a championship," said Fernandez. "All my four MVPs, in a way, were a product of teamwork."

Now in his basketball afterlife, "El Presidente" continues making an assist. Stretched out in one of the chairs of Tisoy's Restaurant, a sports-themed joint with *turo-turo* ambiance that he co-owns along with the likes of business partner Karla Kintanar and current San Miguel Beer hotshot Dondon Hontiveros, Fernandez rattles off his current passions.

"Right now, I'm busy with the Walk Tall with Basketball Ramon Fernandez basketball academy," he said. The academy provides youngsters with the chance to learn the sport the way Fernandez played it.

"It's funny because some children are actually enrolled in the camp because their fathers made them join it," he said. "One kid even told me 'My dad said I should join because you're good and you're famous.'"

Whatever their intentions for joining the camp are, Fernandez gives them his all during the clinics. It is his little way of dishing off an assist to the sport.

Even his latest business venture is an exercise in giving an assist. Fernandez is all set to launch a new line of vinegar called Suka ni Tisoy, a project that was kicked off with the aim of helping out the coconut juice gatherers of the south.

Glimpse of players

He hasn't been keeping abreast of the latest PBA developments lately, preferring to stay as far from the league as possible. Every now and then, though, he gets a glimpse of the players and tries to find himself among the league's current crop of stars.

"I think the one player that impressed me really most was Danny Ildefonso," Fernandez said. "Like me, he does a little bit of everything. And I always thought that if not for these Fil-Ams, he would have been the person to break the record of four MVPs that Alvin [Patrimonio] and I share."

But that's all he allows himself when it comes to the life he once knew. Glimpses. A few looks at the TV during championship games.

On to next chapter

And even in the din of a tense championship arena, when the crowd gets so loud and the players double their intensity, Fernandez can watch without having to worry about growing a wish-I-was-there feeling inside of him.

He has experienced that life and he feels it is time to move on to the next chapter.

"I have done my best for the game, I have left my legacy," he said. "I really don't miss anything about the old life anymore."

Another year has passed. Fernandez takes a step farther from the career that turned him into a revered basketball figure in the country. For him, though, the coming new year is a step closer to fully enjoying the fruits of that career.

RP coach still hoping top striker could play

By Cedelf P. Tupas, *Inquirer Visayas*

NATIONAL TEAM COACH ARIS CASLIB STILL holds out hope that top striker Philip Younghusband will reconsider his decision not to play in the Asean Championships from Jan. 12 in Bangkok.

Doubts over his future with London-based squad Chelsea have compelled the 19-year-old Younghusband to skip the eight-nation biennial tournament and, instead, concentrate on his football career in Britain.

"Phil scored six goals in qualifying and that speaks a lot of his quality as a player," Caslib said, referring to Younghusband, the top scorer in the Asean Qualifiers in Bacolod, whose contract with Chelsea ends in May.

Despite Younghusband's impending absence, Caslib remained upbeat over the nationals' chances in the Asean Championships that starts Jan. 12, when the Philippines battles Malaysia at the Supchalasai Stadium in Bangkok.

Three-time winner Thailand plays the RP team on Jan. 14, before Myanmarese test Filipinos two days later at the Army Stadium.

The return of former nationals Alvin Valeroso—who scored two goals in last year's Asian Challenge Cup in Bangkok—and fleet-footed Arnie Pasinabo, a natural striker who can also play right wing, has given Caslib reason to be optimistic.

The national coach said the core of the 18 players who helped the Philippines hurdle the qualifying tournament in Bacolod City is also set to return for another call of duty.

Among them are James Younghusband and Chris Greatwich, who will join the team only in Bangkok because he is currently trying out with professional clubs in Britain.

TORRE

ANTONIO

Torre, Antonio, 5 others vying in Asian Zonal

SEVEN FILIPINOS LED BY GRANDMASTERS Eugene Torre and Joey Antonio will vie for World Championship slots when the Asian Zonal 3.3 Chess Championship kicks off on Jan. 10 at Phu Quoc in Vietnam's Kien Giang province.

Antonio (Elo 2551) and Eugene Torre (2547) will be joined by GM Mark Paragua, International Masters Ronald Dableo, Oliver Dimakiling, Darwin Laylo and 13-year-old prodigy Wesley So in the nine-round Swiss-system biennial competition.

"I'm carefully choosing the tournaments that I'm joining because I'm busy with my new job," said Torre. but I wouldn't pass up on the Zonal," said Torre, vice president of Fiahchetto Realty Corp. "I'm in good condition now."

Antonio, the country's top scorer in the last year's Turin Chess Olympiad, is coming off a runner-up finish in the Michigan International Open in Michigan last December.

In 1999, the 43-year-old Antonio advanced to the Fide World Championships in Las Vegas after dominating the regional qualifiers in Myanmar.

Torre topped the 1982 Interzonal in Toluca, Mexico, and earned a ticket to the Candidates matches in 1983 edition. Torre eventually lost to Hungarian GM Zoltan Ribli in the quarterfinals.

Marlon Bernardino, Contributor

RIDERS OF THE YEAR

Glen Aguilar of Caltex (third from left) and Jolet Jao of Shell Advance-Kawasaki (fifth from left) show their plaques as Supercross Rider of the Year and Superbike Rider of the Year, respectively, at the recent Namssa Yearend Awards. Taguig Mayor Freddie Tinga (center) presented the plaques to Aguilar and Jao during a simple ceremony at the newly inaugurated Fast Track Motorsports Park in Upper Bicutan, Taguig City. With them are (from left) Taguig City administrator Willy Villar, FIM Asian Motocross Commission president Macky Carapiet, Namssa president Ken Falco and Taguig Vice Mayor George Elias. The Yamaha X1 was also cited as the 2006 Petron Ecofuel Champion.

SPORTSWATCH

Posadas tops P3-M Makati derby

MAKATI COLISEUM'S P3-MILLION "PAMASKONG SALPUKAN" 6-COCK DERBY took a surprise ending last week when an unknown entry, SPDR of La Union cocker Butch Posadas, emerged champion from a record field of 257 bets. The SPDR entry racked up six straight wins in as many encounters, even as five others gunning for the title lost in their championship fights. Posadas pocketed P1.6 million. The fights resume at the venue on Saturday via the "Pinoy Cockers Association of the Philippines (PCAP) 5-cock derby. Entries must be submitted on Friday.

Roligon douses rumors, reappoints GM

POPULAR COCKER-SPORTSMAN AND ROLIGON MEGA COCKPIT OWNER Rolly Ligon has reappointed veteran derby regular Danny Ty as the cockpit's general manager. Ligon made the announcement to douse off rumors that a new group of promoters will handle RMC beginning this January. "Let me clarify that Mr. Danny Ty will remain as Roligon GM, in tandem with hackfight promoters Ronnie Lacsina, Jerry Ang and Ben4 Nadurata."

Derby regulars for SJC Cockers Club

TWENTY-SEVEN DERBY REGULARS HAVE BANDED TOGETHER TO FORM THE SJC Cockers Club which will present eight derbies beginning Jan. 8 at the San Juan Coliseum. The 4-cock format will be adopted in all derbies. Entry fee is P11,000 for members and guest participants. The group's prominent members include 2006 Bakbakan champion Bobby Doromal, Raymond Velayo, Rep. Danny Lagbas, Mayor Salvador Perez, Mario Espinosa of Masbate, Clyde Benabese, Emil Chua, P. Menez, Mayor Wawao Ramos, Ducar Dimayuga, Louie Cua, Totoy Haruta, Vogs Violago, Vince Cuyugan, Dennis Morales, Col del Mundo, Mario Garcia, Tony Manalansan, Osang dela Cruz, Sam Mendoza, Butchoy Olano, Lito Roque, Enjie Nas, Bobby Nicolas, Honey Yu and Anthony Lim.

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BIR still struggling to meet collection goal

Customs seen surpassing ₱197-B target for '06

By Michelle V. Remo

WHILE THE BUREAU OF CUSTOMS HAS ALREADY hit its P197-billion official target for 2006, the Bureau of Internal Revenue continues to struggle to meet its own target of P675.4 billion.

As of November, the BIR's income tax collection fell short of the 11-month target by 7 percent. Income tax on individuals and corporate taxpayers accounts for about 60 percent of the BIR's total collection.

BIR documents showed that the revenue agency collected only P346.5 billion worth of income tax from January to November last year compared with the target of P373 billion.

Failure to meet the income tax collection target pulled down the BIR's total tax collection for the 11-month period to P594.1 billion against its target of P620.9 billion for the period.

The BIR has blamed factors "beyond its control" for its failure to meet the income tax collection goal.

While critics point to inefficiency and corruption as reasons for the tax-collection shortfall, Internal Revenue Commissioner Jose Mario Buñag had stressed that the reduction in the volume of treasury bills and bonds issued by the national government and the declining interest rate were adversely affecting its income tax collection.

The lower-than-programmed volume of government securities issued was due to the government's reducing need for borrowings given an improved fiscal condition. Fiscal developments were likewise credited for the declining interest rates, authorities said.

Buñag added that income tax collection was dependent on the country's economic growth. He said that while actual economic growth did not always hit the target, fiscal authorities did not make the BIR's target flexible with the actual economic growth.

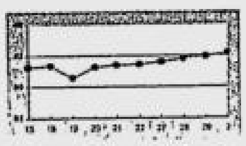
At the Customs bureau, a report from the Office of the Customs Commissioner said its latest count showed that duties and taxes collected by the agency stood at P197 billion, adding that this could rise further after all collection data shall have been collated.

The BOC said its ability to meet its 2006 target was partly boosted by the P4 billion worth of value-added tax on oil imports collected from Petron Corp. in December.

The BOC, the second-biggest revenue earner among govern-

BIR/ B2

INDICATORS



₱48.915 = $1

As of 5 p.m., Jan. 2, 2007

Shares close lower on profit-taking

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 0.19 PERCENT LOWER yesterday on the first trading day of the year on profit-taking among blue-chips, dealers said.

The Philippine Stock Exchange, one of the world's top performers last year, saw its composite index fall 5.69 points to 2,976.85, after moving between 2,964.19 and 2,986.13.

The key index ended 2006 up 42.3 percent

SHARES/ B2

IN THIS ISSUE
Foreign buying at PSE surged 191% in 2006 /B6
P57.2B in capital raised in '06 via stock offerings /B2

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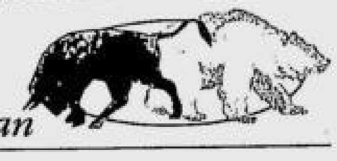
Off to Hong Kong for New Year

MR. BEARBULL



Ron Nathan

I WILL BE 77 ON SATURDAY AND WITH MY blood pressure (now included in the Phisix) threatening to overtake the Hang Seng, I decided to take a week off and revisit Hong Kong. The last time we did this in 2004, we ended up in an air balloon and had to jump from 2,000 feet as it was flying over the airport on a nonstop flight to Beijing. This time, I was more careful and I made sure that we were going by plane from MIA. The package offered by Basura Airlines was too good to resist: 7 days, 6 nights in Hong Kong and Shenzen, including Disneyland for $75.

We arrived at the airport three hours before takeoff and to my horror, everybody had to strip completely, no briefs and no panties. The men were searched intimately by an attractive female guard while the women were checked by a handsome policeman. My wife enjoyed it so much that she went round three times before they caught her.

We were then led into a room, which had a large sign, "Meet the Fokkers." Of course, we thought we were going to see a movie but outside, on the airfield, was a small pink Fokker plane atop a wide-bodied airbus. Basura Airlines saves fuel by piggybacking on a large plane, which dropped away at 10,000 feet, leaving us to glide all the way to Hong Kong.

Pontius, the pilot, assured us that it was quite safe unless the wind changed. Last week, various flights had ended up in Siberia, Mumbai and the Lebanon. This time we were fortunate but over Lantau Island, we just missed the giant Buddha by inches and instead of landing on the runway, we went through the roof of the Immigration Office.

"Hi", I said to the startled immigration officer. "I just dropped in." I thought that was hilarious but he did not see the joke. He thrust some forms at us and where it says 'sex, M or F," my wife wrote a large W. The puzzled officer asked, "W is for woman?" "No", said my wife, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. I was so embarrassed and it is not even true; it is every other Wednesday. On the way back, she wrote infrequently and the officer asked, "Is that one word or two?"

We expected to be transferred by a car or shuttle bus. Imagine our astonishment when we were picked up by a rickshaw. I thought they had disappeared 50 years ago but I suppose it was done to cut down on fuel. We arrived some hours later at our hotel, The Greasy Spoon. It was once a 5-star hotel but had been downgraded by Moody's to a 1-asteroid.

It was so big that if you called reception, they charged you for a long-distance call. Security was so tight that room service was unlisted. I asked for a room near an elevator and they gave me one where the elevator ran straight through the bedroom. Every time I emerged naked from the bathroom, a huge passing crowd would cheer. When I complained, they took away the bath. You could only enter the sauna wearing a suit and tie.

The hotel was not expensive, only $50 a day. In the living room, there was a putting green and a bucket of balls so I amused myself by hitting them into the hole. When we were presented with the bill, it read 6 nights at hotel $300, 6 buckets of balls $600. I protested at this outrage, saying I thought they were free. The manager explained, "Some hotels get you by the room charge: we get you by the balls."

Meals were not included and all the restaurants were very expensive. Finally, we found one that advertised "All you can eat HK$20." However, there was a catch. They give you only one chopstick. The Chinese restaurant was so high class, the menu was in French. The waiter was a chow mien fellow and when I complained that the lights were too bright, he went off to dim sum. There was one unfortunate incident when a man choked to death eating long-life noodles. We ordered duck but when I opened the dish, there was a pair of eyes staring at me. I said to the waiter, "What's this?" "That is peeking duck," he replied. I felt sorry for the chefs, all wok and no play.

My daughter found it difficult to sleep so I put her on the edge of the bed until she dropped off. My wife and I are an ideal couple. She snores and I'm deaf. One day, she went out window-shopping and bought five windows. She spent five hours in one store, stuck in the revolving door. I am not saying she is a big spender but Rustan's has opened a branch in our living room.

The last time we went to Hong Kong, there was a SARS and a bird flu scare, so anyone who coughed or had a temperature above 38 degrees was quarantined. I remember that we went to the floating restaurant, packed with tourists. I got a piece of beef stuck in my throat and coughed violently in an attempt to dislodge it. When I looked up, all the passengers and crew had jumped overboard.

Our shopping expectation to Shenzen was a day to remimbi. Everyone crossing into China first had to have their temperature taken. Unfortunately, the digital thermometers got lost and they had to use rectal thermometers. The sight of a busload of tourists touching their toes with thermometers sticking up was worse than the World Trade Center bombing.

I couldn't change my pesos, and my US dollars were not welcome. Everyone wanted euros or yen. Outside every money changer and bank, there was a notice:

Money speaks all languages, a fact you can determine.

But nowadays, it only speaks in Japanese and German.

At 77, I am getting old. All the names in my black book are doctors, not women. I got married so late in life that Medicare paid for the honeymoon but we produced a daughter in less than a year. After that, I took my wife to a birth control shop called No Kidding.

It was cold in Hong Kong and my wife developed sinus trouble. Sign us a check for this, sign us a check for that. On our last day, we went to Ocean Park but a panda escaped and caused pandemonium. Of course, we visited the Peak. Whoever would have thought that at 77, I would be at my peak.

I have not been following events at home but I heard that most market closed at their high, especially Shanghigh. Also that President Ford had died, Saddam Hussein had been suspended and there were lots of bangs in Bangkok. Next week, back to business. In the meantime, a Happy New Year to all my readers. My New Year's resolution is not to write horrible things about my wife, all 100-kg of her. She was on the weighting list and after she boarded, the pilot ordered another 20 liters of fuel. *mrbearbull.hotmail.com*

P57.2B in capital raised in '06 via stock offerings

More companies seen listing this year

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

SOME P57.2 BILLION IN CAPITAL WAS raised through stock offerings in 2006, up 10.7 percent from year-ago's P51.7 billion, the Philippine Stock Exchange said.

In a statement, PSE president Francis Lim said the amount was the biggest raised through the bourse since 1994 when it started to operate as a stock exchange.

Lim traced the increase to the surge in stock prices, as reflected by the 42.3-percent jump in the PSE index last year.

"I am pretty sure the continued advance of the PSEi, which is now at its highest level in nine years and nine months, has encouraged many companies to offer their shares to the public rather than incur expensive loans to finance their projects," Lim said.

One of the companies that have announced plans to go public this year is television giant GMA Network Inc.

Township developer Megaworld Corp. has also set a stock rights offering of up to 5.9 billion shares for a week starting Jan. 2. The shares were scheduled for listing on Jan. 17. Also, property firm Filinvest Land Inc. will sell up to 7.33 billion common shares in January, to raise funds for key projects.

"I am sure these projects, which have been funded by offering proceeds, are now providing work for thousands of ordinary workers and creating business opportunities for many subcontractors and suppliers," Lim added.

PSE data showed that at least P19 billion of the capital raised in 2006 represented proceeds from the initial public offerings (IPO) of four firms: Geothermal power producer PNOC Energy Development Corp. (P9.6 billion), power generation company First Gen Corp. (P9.09 billion), manufacturing firm Alliance Tuna International (P180.9 million) and online broker CitisecOnline.Com Inc. (P149.6 million).

The bulk of the new equity, amounting to P29.7 billion, represented proceeds from additional or "follow-on" offerings of six companies that were already listed on the stock exchange: Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. (P6.6 billion), Ayala Corp. (P5.8 billion), Megaworld Corp. (P5.6 billion), Robinsons Land Corp. (P5.4 billion), Universal Robina Corp. (P4.8 billion) and Chemrez Technologies (P1.5 billion).

Some P2.3 billion was raised through stock rights offering, while P6.2 billion came from private placements.

BIR still struggling . . .

From page B1

ment agencies after the BIR, was tasked by the national government to collect P197 billion for 2006 to help achieve the target of reducing the budget deficit from P146.8 billion in 2005 to only P125 billion.

According to records from the Department of Finance, the BOC surpassed almost all of its monthly collection targets for 2006 and fell short only in April, September and November.

The DOF said tight spending, the collection performance by the BOC and higher-than-programmed collection of non-tax revenues would help the government achieve a deficit for 2006 that would be way below the ceiling of P125 billion.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves earlier projected that the full-year deficit for 2006 would settle anywhere between P80 billion and P90 billion.

Shares close lower on profit-taking

From page B1

over the closing figure for 2005, supported by an economic rebound, the government's sharply improved fiscal condition and a resurgence in the local currency.

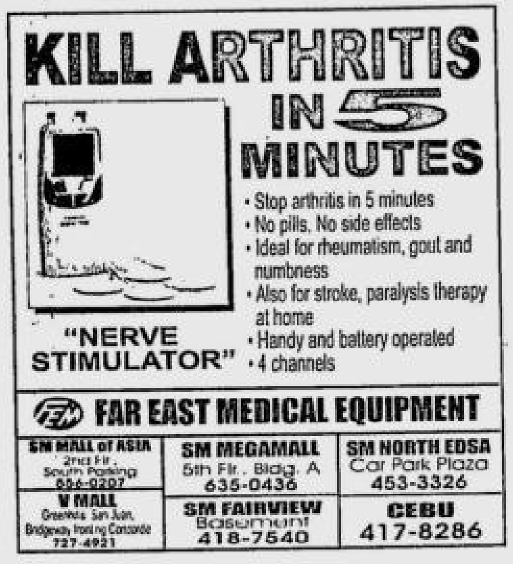
The market's breadth was positive, however, with gainers beating losers 57 to 41, while 53 ended unchanged. Turnover totaled 1.17 billion shares worth P1.5 billion.

"The market's consolidation is expected. Coming from a strong finish in 2006, the soft landing of the financial markets is anticipated at the start of the year," said Astro del Castillo of First Grade Holdings.

"There was clear profit-taking following the window-dressing on the last trading week of 2006 but buyers in late trade stepped up to cut losses," said Rommel Macapagal of Westlink Global Equities.

"The market will keep correcting this week as it begins to build momentum to breach the 3,000 level," he added.

Ayala Corp. fell P20 to P570 while SM Prime Holdings rose 25 centavos to P11, with parent SM Investments also edging up P2.50 to P327.50. *AFP*



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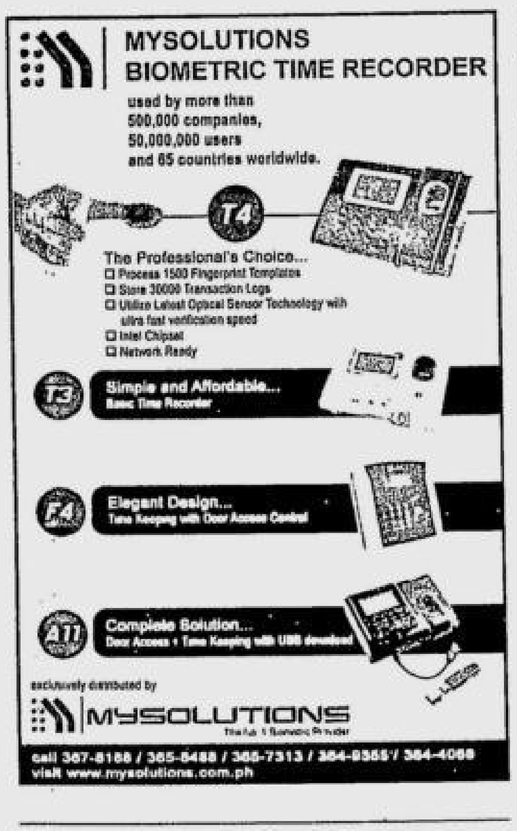

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PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of January 2, 2006)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
FINANCIAL					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	7.4	7.4	7.3	7.4	4,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	46	46	45.5	46	22,600
Bank of the Phil. Islands	63.5	63.5	62.5	63.5	346,000
China Banking Corp.	680	685	680	680	4,830
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	300
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.47	0.48	0.46	0.48	4,800,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	83	83	82	82	8,400
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51	51.5	51	51.5	936,500
Phil. Bank of Comm. A	51.5	55	51	55	2,300
Philippine National Bank	44	44	44	44	1,100
Phil. Savings Bank	48	48	48	48	4,000
Security Bank Corp.	65.5	65.5	65.5	65.5	400
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
Bankard Inc.	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	260,000
Citisecanline.Com Inc.	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.5	51,000
Filipino Fund Inc.	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	1,000
First Metro Invest. Corp.	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	10,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1650	1650	1650	1650	40
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.38	1.4	1.38	1.4	252,000
Sun Life Financial Inc.	2020	2020	2020	2020	80
Ivantage Corp.	1.64	1.64	1.62	1.64	590,000
ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
PNOC Energy Dev. Corp.	4.85	4.85	4.75	4.8	7,517,000
First Gen Corp.	56	56	56	56	21,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	63	64	63	64	884,300
Manila Electric Co. A	54	54.5	54	54	43,600
Manila Electric Co. B	55	55	54.5	55	312,800
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.4	9.4	9.3	9.3	4,013,000
Petron Corp.	4.1	4.15	4.1	4.15	999,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	230,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.16	1.18	1.16	1.18	1,308,000
FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
CADP Group Corp.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	40,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	21	21	20.75	21	16,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	42.5	43.5	42.5	43.5	494,400
RFM Corp.	1.02	1.1	1.02	1.1	333,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	99,000
Swift Food Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	110,000
San Miguel Corp. A	67.5	67.5	66	66.5	180,700
San Miguel Corp. B	77	77	76	77	145,100
Alliance Tuna Int'l. Inc.	2.1	2.14	2.1	2.1	329,000
Universal Robina Corp.	19.25	19.5	19.25	19.25	716,800
CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
Southeast Asian Cement	1	1.1	1	1.1	37,580,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.15	3.2	3.15	3.15	262,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.6	7.7	7.5	7.7	140,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies Inc.	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.4	572,000
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.72	0.72	0.7	0.71	6,390,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.2	0.205	0.195	0.2	7,350,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	5,000,000
Ayala Corp.	580	585	570	570	82,020
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	7	7.2	7	7.2	802,000
Alliance Global Group Inc.	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	10,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	2,500,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	313,000
APC Group Inc.	0.37	0.38	0.37	0.38	250,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	17,000,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.14	1.16	1.12	1.14	1,991,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.52	1.54	1.52	1.54	67,000
ATN Holdings Inc. B	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	35,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp.	3.1	3.15	3.1	3.15	20,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	9.7	10	9.7	10	22,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.14	2.2	2.14	2.2	459,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	6.1	6.1	5.9	5.9	772,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.75	2,613,000
F&J Princ.E Holdings Corp.	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	10,000
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.27	0.32	0.27	0.32	1,670,000
House Of Investments Inc.	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	300,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	10.5	10.75	10.5	10.5	27,500
Medco Holdings	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.25	200,000
Magnum Holdings Inc.	3.85	3.95	3.8	3.95	90,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	1.58	1.58	1.52	1.56	356,000
Pacifica	0.019	0.02	0.019	0.02	6,500,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	2,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	300,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.16	0.165	0.16	0.165	1,610,000
SM Investments Corp.	325	327.5	322.5	327.5	173,200
South China Resources Inc.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	130,000
Seafront Resources Corp.	1.6	1.6	1.54	1.56	176,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co.	0.29	0.31	0.29	0.31	2,440,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.12	0.135	0.12	0.135	20,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	15.25	15.25	15.25	15.25	4,035,200
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.49	0.49	0.48	0.48	180,000
Belle Corp.	1.12	1.12	1.1	1.12	2,002,000
A Brown Company Inc.	1.62	1.62	1.56	1.56	337,000
Cityland Development Corp.	1.6	1.66	1.6	1.66	173,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	620,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.15	269,000
C & P Homes Inc.	1.42	1.42	1.42	1.42	28,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.53	8,470,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	200,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.88	1.96	1.76	1.8	18,982,000
Interport Res. B	0.008	0.0085	0.008	0.0085	11,000,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.45	0.47	0.45	0.47	850,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.64	0.65	0.64	0.65	15,810,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	5	5	4.9	5	241,000
MRC Allied Ind. Inc.	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	20,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	16	16	15.75	16	240,400
Phil Realty And Holdings	0.67	0.67	0.63	0.65	4,620,000
SM Development Corp.	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	300,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	11	11.25	11	11	3,239,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	1,000,000
MEDIA					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	20	20	20	20	3,900
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	0.99	1	0.99	1	7,000
TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	1.94	1.94	1.92	1.94	1,324,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	1240	1240	1240	1240	11,420
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.8	6.9	6.7	6.9	2,721,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2500	2560	2500	2550	275,340
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.195	0.215	0.195	0.215	42,690,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.02	0.019	0.02	18,500,000
Ionics Inc.	2.16	2.16	2.16	2.16	250,000
IPVG Corp.	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7	112,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	5,000,000
Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	2,000
Transpacific Broadband	1.78	1.88	1.64	1.84	2,044,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.032	0.031	0.032	24,100,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	4	4	4	4	31,000
Aboitiz Trans. Sys. Corp.	1.34	1.34	1.34	1.34	150,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	20	20.25	20	20.25	83,400
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.28	15,000
HOTEL & LEISURE					
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	1.86	1.96	1.8	1.92	3,336,000
Philippine Racing Club	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	5,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.59	0.6	0.59	0.6	580,000
EDUCATION					
Centro Escolar University	9	9	8.8	9	33,000
IPeople Inc.	3.1	3.15	3.1	3.15	60,000
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
Easycall Phils. Inc.-Com	3	3	3	3	5,000
Macroasia Corp.	2.14	2.14	2.1	2.1	8,000
Paxys Inc.	19.75	19.75	19.25	19.25	38,100
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	6	6	5.9	5.9	173,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc. B	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.1	54,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.012	32,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.6	9.7	9.6	9.7	750,000
Benguet Corp. A	9.3	9.4	9.3	9.4	10,000
Benguet Corp. B	25	25	25	25	800
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	2.9	3.1	2.9	3.1	3,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.26	4,940,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co. B	0.27	0.28	0.27	0.28	560,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.024	244,900,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.026	0.026	0.026	0.026	21,500,000
Omico Corp.	0.013	0.013	0.012	0.013	57,200,000
Philex Mining Corp.	4.1	4.1	4.05	4.1	421,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.25	18.5	18.25	18.5	20,000
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.73	0.76	0.73	0.76	1,530,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.44	1.54	1.44	1.54	6,834,000
OIL					
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.28	0.31	0.28	0.3	12,870,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.012	392,700,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	84,700,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	1.04	1.16	1.04	1.14	8,351,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	1.06	1.16	1.06	1.14	1,621,000
PNOC Exploration Corp.-B	23	25.5	23	25.5	3,300
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	9.8	10	9.8	10	58,000
PREFERRED					
Ayala Corp. Pref. B	109	109	109	109	2,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	100
WARRANTS, PHIL. DEPOSIT RECEIPTS, ETC.					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (PDR)	20	20	19.75	19.75	91,800
Metro Pac. Inv.- Warrants	3.7	3.8	3.45	3.5	1,097,000

CURRENCIES

January 2, 2007 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.757863	1.000000	49.0450
Japan	Yen	0.006366	0.008400	0.4120
United Kingdom	Pound	1.484502	1.958800	96.0693
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.097451	0.128586	6.3065
Switzerland	Franc	0.621861	0.820546	40.2437
Canada	Dollar	0.650136	0.857854	42.0734
Singapore	Dollar	0.494140	0.652018	31.9782
Australia	Dollar	0.597401	0.788271	38.6608
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.010353	2.652661	130.0998
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.202248	0.266866	13.0884
Brunei	Dollar	0.492534	0.649899	31.8743
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000084	0.000111	0.0054
Thailand	Baht	0.020994	0.027701	1.3586
UAE	Dirham	0.206367	0.272301	13.3550
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.319500	64.7149
Korea	Won	0.000815	0.001076	0.0528
China	Yuan**	0.097098	0.128121	6.2837
Argentina	Peso	0.247263	0.326264	16.0016
Brazil	Real	0.355138	0.468604	22.9827
Denmark	Kroner	0.134208	0.177088	8.6853
India	Rupee	0.017182	0.022671	1.1119
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.214875	0.283527	13.9056
Mexico	New Peso	0.070221	0.092657	4.5444
New Zealand	Dollar	0.534308	0.705020	34.5777
Norway	Kroner	0.121690	0.160570	7.8752
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012450	0.016428	0.8057
South Africa	Rand	0.107724	0.142142	6.9714
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023262	0.030694	1.5054

Source: REUTERS' FOREX CLOSING PRICES as of NY Time- Jan. 1, 2007
* Various banks in Bahrain as quoted in Reuters' Screen. ** Asian Time Closing Rate as of Dec. 29, 2006

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MOTORING
Editor Cesar D. Mangawang
Text us your feedback: inquirer mtr name/age/city/message to 2207

The 'hot' and 'cold' of the 'Taxilog'

"WE CREATE, others will imitate." Toyota produces another potential winner with the Avanza. PHOTOS BY: RYAN LIM

By Tessa R. Salazar

(Second of two parts)

LAST WEEK, INQUIRER MOTORing started its series on Toyota's newest and soon-to-be beast of burden, the Avanza 1.3-liter taxi variant—a future do-it-all workhorse, but a more compact replacement to its legendary FX line. It was also mentioned that the taxi variant of Avanza 1.3 that costs a "masa-friendly" P565,000 doesn't have the third row seats compared to the privately owned variants 1.3 (P582,000) and the 1.5 G automatic (P773,000) and the manual transmission (P738,000), as the Land Transportation Franchising Regulatory Board does not allow seven- or eight-seaters for taxis.

Equipped with a working taxi meter ready for charging passengers for every 250 meters traveled and a LED "For Hire" just behind the windshield's rear-view mirror, this taxi variant unit is equipped with an LPG tank hidden beneath carpet matting at the backmost portion of this MPV. The LPG installation left ample space at the rear for what pundits jokingly remarked as an opportunity to set up a "mini-kitchen" of sorts (hence the word "taxilog" was coined).

Toyota converted just this one Avanza unit into a hybrid LPG vehicle solely for testing purposes. TMP has declared it will not be producing this setup as an OEM but would instead recommend installers that had passed various technical tests. LPG installation would cost up to an additional P60,000.

Interior

What do you expect from a versatile multipurpose vehicle that's just P100,000 higher than the cheapest Korean budget mini cars?

The dashboards are made of PVC foam with polypropylene (ABS Resin) while roof linings are nonwoven fabric. The floor covering is of nonwoven fabric that underwent a needle punch process. The brakes are hydro-vacuum systems. The size of the brake discs is 13" in front, while the rear is of drum brake configuration. Don't expect an antilock brake system (ABS) on a budget vehicle like this.

Don't keep your expectations up, as well, on the door's build quality. There is a more solid thud when you close the front doors, but the rear passenger doors require more "finesse." Door hinges on the second row are narrower, considering the doors here are heavier.

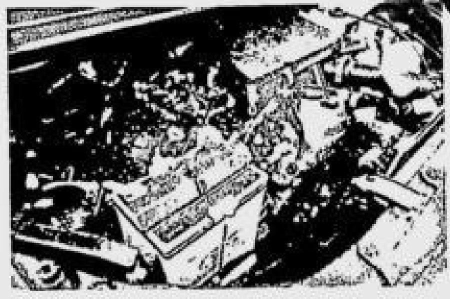
Because the Avanza is positioned as an entry-level MPV, Toyota's tech people stressed that it has put all possible efforts to reduce manufacturing costs and offer it at a price that is affordable to the market. Thus, it is equipped with specifications that would fit the price range of an entry-level vehicle, while at the same time all specs and parts are claimed to have passed Toyota Quality Standards.

As most budget vehicles in the country, the middle seats are still equipped with pelvis-stretching lap belts instead of the safer three-point seatbelt. We wonder, however, if rear passengers would even bother to use restraints. As of the moment, the lap belt is the only specification the carmaker can accommodate for the entry-level MPV.

Clutch, suspension

The Avanza 1.3 taxi unit we drove carries a cable clutch instead of the more expensive hydraulic clutch. Toyota notes that only the 1.3 variant uses cable clutch system.

Toyota techies defended the cable clutch, arguing that in terms of wear and tear, reliability and quality, the cable clutch is the same as its hydraulic cousins. The basic difference is that hydraulic clutches, because they employ fluid, are softer to use. Well, that and the fact that cable clutches only require more frequent servicing/adjustment.



THE INNARDS under the hood

Transmission's a bit noisy, most likely caused by a lack of insulation in the under carriage. Compared to a 1.3 Vios, the Avanza 1.3 is indeed noisier because of its bigger and heavier body. (Note: Curb Weight: Avanza—1,045kg/Vios—930kg; Gross Vehicle Weight: Avanza—1,585kg/Vios—1,480kg

In front, it has Macpherson double strut with coil spring and stabilizer. Its rear is four-link with coil spring.

Aside from the instrument panel that indicates conventional gasoline fuel levels, a light indicator (on the LPG-petrol button) determines the LPG tank levels.

Ride comfort

For this entry level taxi, expect no power windows and no power locks (not even vanity mirrors). Maybe the manual locks and windows are in compliance to passenger security requirements by the LTFRB. We don't see any power-windowed or power-locked taxis out there, do you?

The ride is a bit bouncy without passengers, but when loaded, the bounciness is minimized.

The most frequent parts to be replaced for the first three years are the gas filters (for LPG) plus the spark plug, oil filters and so on. Toyota dealers assure it would service converted Avanzas, as long as those Avanzas were converted by the recommended suppliers and an LPG sequential kit system is also in place. Toyota's recommended LPG installers employ the closed loop system (electronic fuel injected type) that has undergone tests and evaluation.

Performance

Avanza gets the inherent advantage of a rear-wheel drive just like its heavy-duty predecessor FX and the Innova. The engine hasn't been scrimped on, as well, with the VVT-i (variable valve timing-intelligent) for better fuel efficiency, lower emissions and higher power. The steering is soft and light. The shifting is nice. Its dual fuel system is nifty with its shift-on-the-fly capability. There was a slight stutter when we shifted the fuel source from gasoline to LPG, but the rpm didn't change, which only meant that Toyota matched its gasoline EFI to the LPG seamlessly.

We were also pleasantly surprised to notice almost no difference in performance between gasoline and LPG fuel for this Avanza unit, at least for the first few kilometers. More responsiveness in gas and a slight delay in the sensor system of the LPG would most likely be felt during long drives and on winding roads. The heating value of gasoline is higher (gasoline's energy content per unit weight is still higher than the same amount of liquefied petroleum gas), so expect better performance from gasoline especially when going uphill.

Fuel consumption

Combining a 50-liter tank of LPG with another 50-liter tank of gasoline into one vehicle unit obviously increases distances between fill-ups. For taxi drivers, this means fewer trips to the gas station during a given day (which means less idle time). We computed a run of roughly 540 km on a full tank of LPG. But does using LPG really save gas money for our future Avanza taxi driver?

For the sake of argument, let's say that one full 50-liter tank of gasoline also runs for 540 km. So, a combined LPG and gasoline run carries our driver up to 1,080 km. If a 50-liter tank of LPG costs P1,150 (at a price of P23 per liter), and a full 50-liter gasoline tank costs P1,850 (at a per liter price of P37), the combined cost of filling up the two tanks would be P3,000, for a per kilometer run cost of P2.77 (P3,000 divided by 1,080 km).

If our driver chose to use only gasoline instead, for the whole distance, then the fill-ups would cost P3,700 (2 x 1,850), for a per kilometer run cost of P3.40. The difference between P2.77 and P3.40 seems slight, but in the course of around 300 to 500 kilometers—an average daily run for a taxi driver—that difference magnifies to up to P315 every day (63 cents x 500 km). That's no laughing matter for a taxi driver trying to make ends meet.

Verdict: Though we can't heap enough praises for the VVT-i engine by itself, we must also warn future owners that the engine size of 1.3 liters for an MPV is a bit small. But then, you never know what the Filipino taxi driver is capable of doing with a small, uhm, engine. Better get used to high-revving this Avanza variant to get it up to highway speeds. An 80-kph run already registers 3,000 on the tachometer; a 100-kph run touches 3,500. But if you're already squirming from all the gasoline being burned up by such dizzying rpm, then the LPG tank could save you an emergency trip to the gas station. The Avanza 1.3 with LPG is perfect for commercial purposes in city traffic, where you wouldn't really expect to speed up beyond 60 kph. And then you're spreading the emissions of nostalgic home-cooking gas, not lung-destroying smog.

(Inquirer Motoring acknowledges the invaluable assistance of "professional passengers" and gear heads from the University of the Philippines' mechanical engineers.)

Mitsubishi Strada: Stylish sports pickup

ON THE ROAD

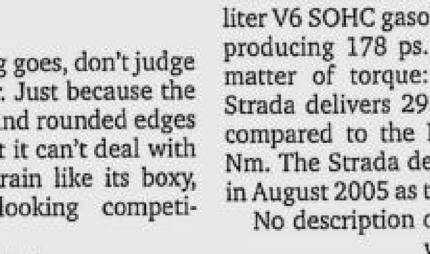
Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

IF YOU WERE TO ASK THE MOTORing media about the best cars and trucks launched in 2006, chances are the majority would choose the 2007 Mitsubishi Strada as their favorite new pickup truck.

Off-road purists, of course, would prefer the new 3.0-liter 4x4 Ford Ranger MT which delivers 380 Nm of torque at 1,800 rpm compared to the 2.5-liter 4x4 Strada's 314 Nm/2,000 rpm max torque. But that's like comparing apples and oranges, for this is a 2.5 and that is a 3.0 liter. And hey, just park the Strada beside the Ranger and tell me: which one looks snazzier?

Off-road

But, as the saying goes, don't judge a book by its cover. Just because the Strada has curves and rounded edges does not mean that it can't deal with rough off-road terrain like its boxy, more workhorse-looking competitors. With its solid ladder frame body structure, suspension setup consisting of double wishbones up front and leaf spring beam axle at the rear plus a rear hybrid limited slip differential (LSD), the Strada tackles mud pits, water crossings, hill ascents and descents, gravel, rocks and slippery surfaces as ably as other vaunted off-road champions. All you have to do to gain off-road traction is shift on the fly (up to 100 kph) from 2WD to 4WD via the secondary Easy Select 4WD shift lever.



BLUE-ILLUMINATED meters highlight the sporty cockpit.

The Strada, imported from Thailand, is equipped with a 2.5-liter Di-D (Direct injection Diesel) common rail 4-in-line twin cam turbocharged and intercooled engine packing peak output of 134 ps together with the aforementioned 314 Nm max torque.

This powerplant is mated to either a 5-speed manual transmission (MT) or 4-speed automatic tranny (AT) in the top-of-the-line GLS model (P1.2 million for MT, P1.25 million for AT) which has a third brake lamp, side aluminum stepboards, rear aluminum stepboard, bedliner and cargo hooks as standard equipment. The GLX Strada (P1.05 million) is offered with MT only and side stepboards, third brake lamp and cargo frames.

Whether MT or AT, the Strada can do 175 kph, but of course the surge of power and torque feels quicker with the stick shift.

Di-D engine

Significantly enough, Mitsubishi Motors Philippines chose to bring in the 2.5 Di-D Strada instead of the 3.5-liter V6 SOHC gasoline engine Strada producing 178 ps. Perhaps it was a matter of torque: the gasoline-fed Strada delivers 295 Nm max torque compared to the Di-D Strada's 314 Nm. The Strada debuted in Thailand in August 2005 as the Triton.

No description of the 2007 Strada would be complete without something about its futuristic-looking yet functional and roomy two-tone interior. The blue-illuminated instrument meters; multi-information monitor that displays the time, altitude, barometer, direction, outside temperature, average speed, fuel consumption and distance you can go with the amount of fuel left in the tank (in the GLS); tire pressure monitoring system (GLS); retractable rear vent power window (GLS); MP3/iPod/USB-ready stereo system with six speakers; automatic climate control aircon (GLS); illuminated key cylinder; large floor console with lid, cup holder and accessory socket—all these create a high level of comfort and convenience for the driver and four passengers.

Cabin

With a wider and longer cabin area, the rear bench seat can comfortably accommodate three adults if the rear-seat center folding armrest with cupholders is stowed. The GLS has ABS with EBD apart from the dual SRS airbags, side-door impact beams and 3-point ELR seatbelts that are standard equipment in the GLX. In both variants, the front brakes are 16-inch ventilated discs but the rear brakes are drums.

I had the good fortune of test-driving for one week each the GLS AT and the GLS MT. At the risk of sounding cliché, I would describe the experience as like driving a long crossover SUV—a car-based sport utility vehicle. The Strada, whether AT or MT, provides nearly car-like ride quality, utmost comfort and convenience, exhilarating engine response and—for a pickup—surprisingly sharp handling.

Plus the solid strength, stability, cargo load capacity (400 kg) and off-road traction of a 4x4 truck. And, to top it all, spectacular good looks incorporating Mitsubishi's Racing Truck Evolution concept. The latest Strada is truly a sports pickup in every nuance of the word, kudos to Mitsubishi's motorsports DNA and street cred.

***

ERRATA: The head of last week's column should have read "The Little Car with a Heart" instead of "...the Heart" and the first sentence should not have the word "the" to correctly read: "With hope and goodwill still energizing people," etc.

THE STYLISH new Mitsubishi Strada

Two hacks, bad sushi and the Hyundai Accent

MY DRIFT

Andre Palma

UNPLANNED AND COMPLETELY spontaneous, I found myself in the driver's seat of the Accent, Hyundai's current bet in the struggling compact sedan segment. Fellow motoring hack and petrol head Botchi Santos of Top Gear Philippines was in possession of the media test unit and the tiny little Korean sedan would serve as our steed on the way to the unsuspecting, "eat all you can" sushi place we had decided to run into bankruptcy. I found myself disappointed by night's end but in a complete reversal of what I had expected, it was the sushi that was found rather wanting.

I will admit a bias for anything with a diesel-fed, common rail direct injection engine. Usually turbocharged and sometimes intercooled, these power plants are changing the way that the consumer looks at diesel-powered automobiles. A few years back, only but mention the word diesel and reaction most associated and recalled would have been "smoke belcher."

Say diesel these days and affix the CRDi acronym to it and the new associated bywords are torque, improved acceleration and g-force. Diesel has now become sexy. Diesel now means performance. Diesel is somehow a good thing. This phenomenon of changing perceptions alone should convince the manufacturers that common-rail turbo engines are a step in the right direction; image is no longer an uphill battle when it comes to the diesel powerplant.

Only once confined to pickups and SUVs, the common-rail trend has found itself into the other market segments as well. It is in this respect that Hyundai finds itself the distinct pioneer. Modern diesel power has found itself in cars from the Hyundai marquee that are unique but logical solutions for everyday motorists. Why limit the benefits of the high pressure common-rail injection system to the usual suspects?

Sporting potential

Hyundai ruffled quite a few feathers when it first released the Matrix mini-MPV with CRDi power. So sufficient was the pull and torque of this chassis and engine package that many, this writer included, considered the sporting potential of such a vehicle. Small, short wheelbase auto with an able engine begged the question of autocross and rallying. Further consideration eventually revealed that without any factory support, such an endeavor would have been futile.

The release of the Getz super mini with the same 1.5-liter, 102-bhp and 235-Nm turbo diesel got a lot more drivers interested in the idea of a lightweight, relatively inexpensive car with more than adequate amounts of pull. Again, the challenges of preparing such a car to basic levels of safety and performance seemed more mountain than molehill. Maybe the idea of a quick, small diesel racer is really realistically out of the question?

The answer to that question finally comes in the form of the Accent. I firmly believe that any aspirations of real speed are lost on this car. The need to fabricate bespoke parts such as suspension, brakes and chassis modifications are arguments enough that I may have missed the point about these common-rail nutters from Hyundai. It is in the daily drive experience that they deliver where they make the most sense.

Mediocre product

The best way to describe the Hyundai Accent is that it is a mediocre product that is made intriguing by the engine. More potent than the previous 1.5-liter, turbo CRDi units on the Matrix and Getz, the 114-bhp and 241-Nm of pull combine with the sub 1200-kg weight to make a car that can zip in and out of the worst Manila has to offer. I'd love to believe that all the other systems on the car, like suspension, brakes and chassis stiffness are at the very least average, but in all reality the Accent is still at the very least a generation away from that the major manufacturers have in the showrooms.

For fear of sounding like a skipping vinyl record, I say without hesitation that the Accent's powerplant is the sole reason for the impact it made on me, in such a short period of time. Two thumbs up for placing such an able lump into a car that any other manufacturer would have placed a small displacement gasoline unit into. That took guts from the Hyundai product planners, and I tip my pen to whoever these people are.

In the Hyundai Accent, a buyer can opt to break from the usual and the boring. Excitement can really be had with this car, imagine it's small, quick and likely quirky. These factors spell character in any book, but what kind of character it speaks of is an entirely different discussion altogether. In the end though, we get a product that makes sense but hopefully works well enough to justify the current premium most all models of modern diesel cars.

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Notice is hereby given that the following companies/employers have filed with this Regional Office application/s for Alien Employment Permit/s:

Name and address of Company/Employer	Name of Foreign National	Position
CHONTA CHICKEN BARBEQUE 643 General Malvar St., Malate Manila	Kyung Ok Myung	Cashier
MIT UNIVERSAL INSTITUTE INC. 4/F JGC Phils., Annex Bldg., Trade St. cor. Investment Drive MBP, Ayala Alabang, Muntinlupa City	Young Boon Choi (w/o Lee)	School Supervisor
PHIL-HELLAS LINK CORP. 6 Granite Rd., Pilar Village, Las Piñas City	Ioannis Sokratis Krystallidis	President/CEO
I.T. KOR INC. 1715 J. Bocobo St., Malate, Manila	Jong Yul Lee	Consultant
KENZO-KIZIA GARMENTS, INC. 796-C G. Borja St., Pateros, Metro Manila	Youngho Cho	Operation Manager
SUZHOU DIMSUM CORPORATION 1715 A. Mabini St., Malate, Manila	Weihu Chen	General Manager
MAERSK ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER LIMITED 17/F Wynsum Corporate Plaza, Emerald Ave., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Grant Quincy Magerman	Assistant Manager, AAM Safmarine
SPACE GROUP PHILS., INC. Suite 2004, Antel Global Corporate Center Julia Vargas Ave., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Jung Jae Lee	Project Manager
SPACE GROUP PHILS., INC. Suite 2004, Antel Global Corporate Center Julia Vargas Ave., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Sang Chul Park	Project Manager
IBM DAKSH BUSINESS PROCESS SERVICES PHILIPPINES INC. 30/F PBCom Tower, Ayala Avenue, Makati City	Gyutae Kim	Customer Service Specialist
MIREPA ENGLISH TRAINING CENTER, INC. 2403B West Tower, PSEC Exchange Rd., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Sung Mi Kim	Marketing Manager
MIREPA ENGLISH TRAINING CENTER, INC. 2403B West Tower, PSEC Exchange Rd., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Sun Kyung Jung (wife of Park)	Operation Manager
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PHILIPPINES FOUNDATION, INC. U-12A Pet Plans Tower, EDSA Ave., Guadalupe Viejo, Makati City	Jeffrey Neal Abbott	Grants Specialist
LEEKIE ENTERPRISES, INC. Burgundy Corporate Tower, 252 24/F Senator Gil Puyat Ave., Makati City	Yu Cai	Customer Support Staff
LEEKIE ENTERPRISES, INC. Burgundy Corporate Tower, 252 24/F Senator Gil Puyat Ave., Makati City	Lai Yee Yap	Customer Support Staff
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LEEKIE ENTERPRISES, INC. Burgundy Corporate Tower, 252 24/F Senator Gil Puyat Ave., Makati City	Kim Lin Chin	Customer Support Staff

If you have any information/objection to the abovementioned application/s please communicate with the Regional Director.

ERNESTO C. BIHIS
Regional Director

(PDI–Jan. 3, 2007)

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Location: Lot 5 Greenmeadow Avenue, Greenmeadow Subdivision
TCT No.: 228549
Description: (1) Vacant Residential Lot
Total Area: 3,138.60 sqms. more or less
Indicative Selling Price: ₱43,539,500.00

* property is sold on an "as is where is" basis *
* subject to bank's evaluation and approval *
* subject to change without prior notice to the public *

For Inquiries, please call:
UNITED COCONUT PLANTERS BANK
Asset Management and Disposition Division
Hotline No. 8119797

UCPB

BANK ACQUIRED ASSET FOR SALE

Location: Lot 4A & Lot 4B Magsaysay Avenue, Brgy. Singcang-Airport, Bacolod City
TCT Nos.: 300827 & 300826
Description: (2) Vacant Commercial Lots
Total Area: 1,330.00 sqms. more or less
Indicative Selling Price: ₱7,980,000.00

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID FOR THE TWO-YEAR SECURITY SERVICES REQUIREMENTS OF LBP

The Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) invites interested suppliers to apply for eligibility and to bid for the project stated below, under the following terms and conditions:

ITB No. / Cont. Package No.	Item / Description	Approved Budget	Non-Refundable Fee	Source of Funds
2006-308	Two-Year Security Services Requirements for the following areas:			
1	NCR-North of Pasig - 110 SGs	P 32,815,200.00	P 16,500.00	LBP Funds
2	NCR-South of Pasig - 124 SGs	36,991,680.00	18,500.00	LBP Funds
3	Cagayan & East Central Luzon - 67 SGs	13,890,120.00	7,000.00	LBP Funds
4	Laguna, South and West & Southern Luzon - 104 SGs	23,710,440.00	11,900.00	LBP Funds
5	Panay and Negros Islands - 66 SGs	13,052,160.00	6,600.00	LBP Funds
6	Central and East Visayas - 87 SGs	17,574,120.00	8,800.00	LBP Funds
7	Regions 10 and 11 - 107 SGs	21,379,080.00	10,700.00	LBP Funds
8	Regions 9 and 12 - 98 SGs	18,962,040.00	9,500.00	LBP Funds

Only Suppliers who meet the following minimum requirements may participate in the bidding:

- Those with eligibility requirements prescribed under the IRR-A of RA 9184.
- Those with minimum number of 200 guards deployed as of September 30, 2006.
- Those with serviceable firearm-to-guard ratio of at least 1:3 based on the existing guards as of September 30, 2006.
- Those with experience in providing security services to a bank duly authorized by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.
- Those with no pending case against Land Bank of the Philippines or vice versa.
- Those with profitable operation for the last three (3) years as evidenced by its submission of Audited Financial Statements for 2003, 2004 and 2005.
- Those who have paid the required non-refundable fee for the applicable package.

The Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Post qualification of the lowest calculated bid shall be conducted.

Bidding for the above requirements is scheduled on **January 31, 2007 at 10:00 A.M.** and pertinent Bid Documents may be obtained from the General Services Department, 25th Floor, LANDBANK Plaza, M. H. del Pilar corner Dr. Quintos Streets, Malate, Manila, **upon payment of the applicable non-refundable fee as indicated opposite the contract package which the supplier intends to bid.**

Interested suppliers are requested to attend the **Pre-Bid Conference** scheduled on **January 18, 2007 at 10:00 A.M.** at the 10th Floor, Function Room, LANDBANK Plaza, Malate, Manila.

All particulars relative to **Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conference(s), Evaluation of Bids, Post Qualification and Award of Contract** shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of **RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).**

LANDBANK reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder(s).

(PDI-Jan. 3, 2007)

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Republic of the Philippines
Province of Bohol
Municipality of Pilar

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

Date : January 3, 2007
Contract No.: SP-109-IN-01
World Bank Loan No: 4446 PH

1. The Government of the Philippines has received a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development towards the cost of Local Government Finance and Development and intends to apply part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the Contract for the ***Construction of 2-storey 22 Classroom Building, H.E. Building, Industrial Arts Building and Science Laboratory Building including Site Development Works.*** Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the *Guidelines: Procurement under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits.*
2. The ***Municipality of Pilar, Bohol*** invites sealed bids from eligible sources for the ***Construction of 2-storey 22 Classroom Building, 1 Unit H.E. Building, 1 Unit Science Laboratory Building, 1 Unit Industrial Arts Building, Site Grading, PCCP Road, Water Tank, Drainage System and Garbage Bin.***
3. Bidding documents may be purchased from ***January 3 - February 1, 2007 at the BAC Chairman, MPDC Office, Municipal Building, Pilar, Bohol*** upon payment of a non-refundable fee of ***Five Thousand Pesos (Php 5,000.00)*** or its equivalent in a freely-convertible currency, for each set. Interested bidders may obtain further information at the same address.
4. Bids shall be valid for a period of ninety (90) days after bid opening and must be accompanied by bid security of ***Five Hundred Ninety One Thousand Pesos (Php 591,000.00)*** in a form of cash, certified check, bank guarantee or its equivalent in a convertible currency, and shall be delivered to the ***BAC Chairman, MPDC Office, Municipal Building, Pilar, Bohol*** on or before ***February 1, 2007 at 10:00 a.m.*** at which time they will be opened in the presence of the bidders who wish to attend.
5. The Bidder with the Lowest Calculated Bid (LCB) shall advance to the post-qualification stage in order to finally determine its responsiveness to the technical and financial requirements of the project. The contract shall then be awarded to the Lowest Calculated Responsive Bidder (LCRB) who was determined as such during post qualification. The **Estimated Project Cost** for the subproject is ***Twenty Three Million Six Hundred Thirty Eight Thousand Three Hundred Ninety Two and 88/100 (Php 23,638,392.88).***
6. A pre-bid conference will be held on ***January 18, 2007*** at ***10:00 a.m.*** at the SB Session Hall, Municipal Building, Pilar, Bohol.

(Sgd.)JOSEPH R. ANANIA
BAC Chairman

(PDI – January 3, 2007)

Republic of the Philippines
Province of Cagayan
Municipality of Buguey

December 18, 2006

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Local Government Unit of Buguey, through its Supplemental Budget No. 01, CY 2006, intends to use the sum of FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND (P500,000.00) PESOS being the Approved Budget for the Contract for the Purchase of One (1) unit Second Hand Motor Vehicle described as follows:

DESCRIPTION : MITSUBISHI L300 VAN (EXCEED)
DIESEL ENGINE, 12 SEATERS
MODEL 2001

SCHEDULE OF BIDDING ACTIVITIES:

- Jan. 04, 2007 – Submission of Letter of Intent & issuance of eligibility requirements.
- Jan. 05, 2007 – Issuance of notice of eligibility or non eligibility and issuance of Bid Documents upon payment of non-refundable amount of Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00)
- Jan. 15, 2007 – Deadline of Submission of Bids at 10:00 AM
  – Opening of Bids immediately after the submission of bids at the Office of the BAC Chairman

Interested bidders may obtain further information from the Office of the BAC Chairman, Municipal Building, Centro, Buguey, Cagayan.

All particulars relative to the Qualification/Eligibility, Bid Bond, Performance Bond, Pre-bid conference, Bid Evaluation and Award of Contract shall be governed by the provisions of RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.

The Local Government Unit of Buguey reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

(Sgd.) **MELVIN A. AGBALOG**
BAC Chairman

(PDI – Dec. 27, 2006 & Jan. 3, 2007)

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

Please be informed that **HONEY D. GALANG** is no longer connected with **COMPASS TRAVEL AND TOURS** effective **December 8, 2006.** Any transactions made with her after the said date will not be honored by our office. Thank you.

(PDI - Dec. 24, 27, 31, 2006 & Jan. 3, 2007)

BOARD OF INVESTMENTS

dti

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that UNIVERSAL PACIFIC KNITTING MILLS, INC. is applying for registration with the Board of Investments (BOI) as New Export Producer of Knitted Fabrics with a capacity of 886,275 kgs/year on a Non-Pioneer Status with project/plant site located at Block 3 Lot 8 Manchester Subd., Quezon City.

Any person with valid objection/s on the above-mentioned project may file his/her objection in writing, under oath, with the BOI within three (3) days from the date of this publication.

(Sgd.) **RUDY B. CAÑA**
Director
Project Evaluation and
Registration Department

Industry & Investments Building,
385 Sen. Gil J. Puyat Ave., Makati City, Philippines
Tel.: (632) 897-6682 Fax No.: (632) 895-3521 (IPG)
(632) 895-3981 (IG) (632) 895-3978 (TSG)
(632) 890-3051 (AD)
E-mail OSAC@boi.gov.ph Homepage: http://www.boi.gov.ph
Cable address: INVESTBOARD P.O. Box 1872 Makati

(PDI January 3, 2007)

ERRATUM

In the **Notice to the Motoring Public** advertisement of the **Land Transportation Office** published last **Dec. 30 & 31, 2006**, the phrase on the first paragraph "...through the implementation of the PETC-ITF International Project" should have read "through the implementation of the **PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project.**"
Our apologies.

NOTICE TO THE MOTORING PUBLIC

Pursuant to DOTC Department Orders 2005-34 and 2005-37, the DOTC/LTO is mandated to efficiently and effectively implement the emission standards for motor vehicles as provided by the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 through the implementation of the ***PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project***.

The PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project allows the interconnection between the PETC's and the existing DOTC/LTO Information Technology System (DOTC/LTO IT System). With a three-way matching capability, the PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project permits online authentication with the LTO-IT System which immediately locks the Certificate of Emission Compliance (CEC) number to the accredited testing centers and the motor vehicle record, which would subsequently prevent the re-issuance of the CEC to another motor vehicle.

Effective **JANUARY 2, 2007**, the public is strongly advised to have their motor vehicle emission test processed by DTI Accredited and DOTC/LTO Authorized PETCs that are connected online and real time to the LTO-IT system and bearing this seal

REYNALDO I. BERROYA
Assistant Secretary
LAND TRANSPORTATION OFFICE

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VENUS DOMINGO BALANE

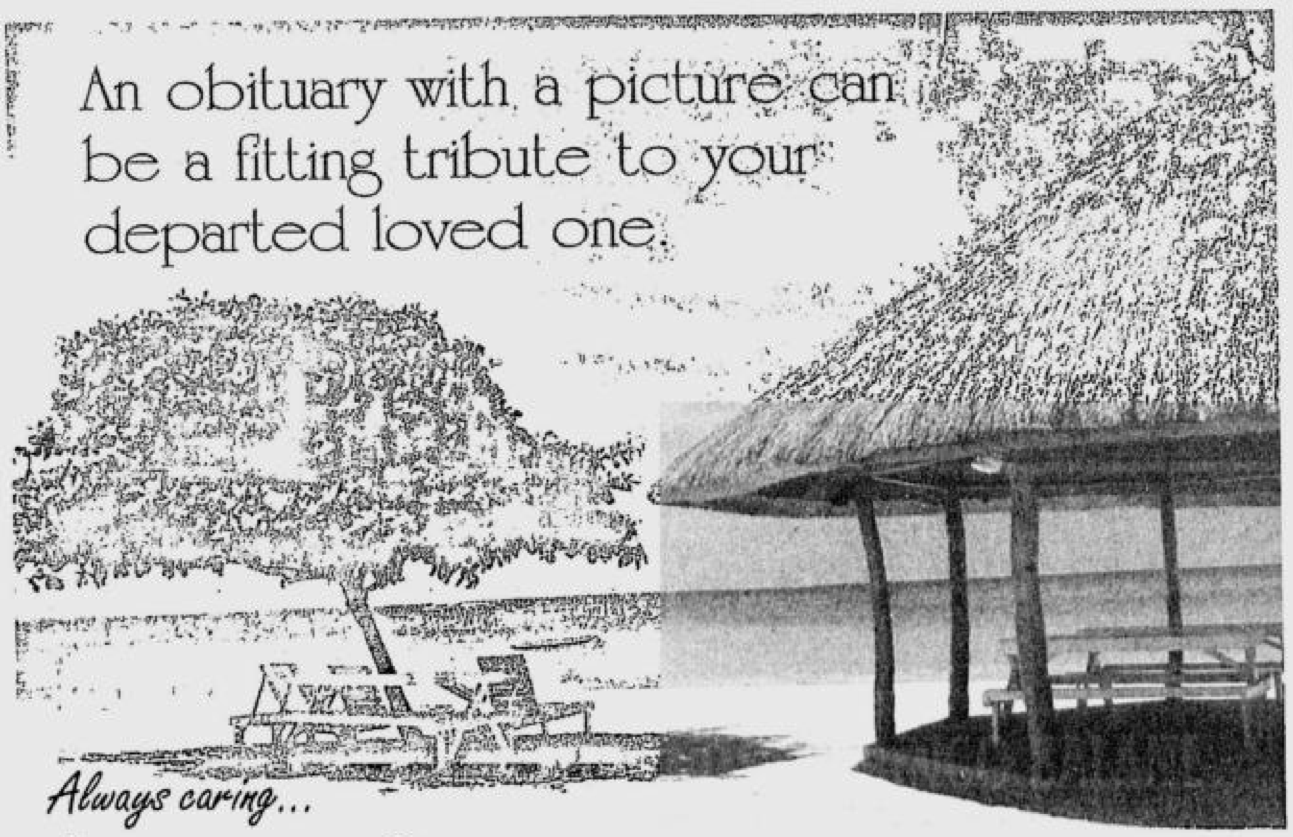
Peacefully joined her Creator on January 2, 2007.

She will be deeply missed by
Her children – **Linda** and **Timothy Buckley**, **Cynthia**, **Heidi** and **Tony Gold**, **Mario** and **Ruby**, **Sonia** and **Miguel Gonzalez**

Her brothers and sisters – **Minda**, **Isagani** (†), **Filipinas**, **Luzon** and **Bobby Cullen**, **Ibarra** (†), **Visayas**, **Minerva** and **Antonio Kohtiao**

Her grandchildren – **Mark** and **Alexis**, **Sigrid** and **Camille Aragona**, **Jeremy** and **Gregory Gold**.

Her remains lie in state at Capilla del Señor, Santuario de San Antonio. Mass and funeral will be at 2:00 p.m. on January 4, 2007.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OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS: ❶ Copy of Death Certificate
❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

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Message of Thanks

We, the loving husband and father **Henry**, children and siblings **Hans Clifford** and **Charlene Hazel** of

CRISTINA, HOWELL CHRISTIAN, and HUGH CONROY O. YAO

who joined their Creator on December 28, 2006 would like to convey our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all those who grieved with us, prayed with us, offered masses, flowers, and messages of sympathy to us, and who generously offered their time to us this past week in comforting us during our time of such pain and sorrow.

We hope you could join us one last time as we finally lay our loving family to rest at 8am this morning at Heritage Park.

Remember Us With Sunshine

Remember us with sunshine,
laughter, joy and song.
No tears please, for we're with Jesus now,
where we belong.
Although our stay here
with you, was oh so brief
Giving up our earthly form was such a relief.
Throughout our short lives
We've received so much,
Everyone's love and tenderness
in each soft touch.
As you remember us in the coming days,
Remember that we loved you all
in very special ways.
We're laughing with the angels now,
Because from here in God's Kingdom,
the world has such a beautiful view.

Mortuary and Crematory at The Heritage Park

"Eternal life will swallow up that which can die. God made us for this very reason and He has given us the Spirit as a guarantee that we will live again."

2 Corinthians 5:4-5

BUSINESS

Measures seen to protect investors' earnings in quasi-banks

By Doris C. Dumlao

AFTER LIBERALIZING QUASI-banking activities for the first time since the 1980s, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas has slapped stiffer requirements on these institutions to better safeguard small investors.

Nestor Espenilla Jr., BSP deputy governor for bank supervision, told reporters that the policy-making Monetary Board on Thursday approved the imposition of tighter requirements on quasi-banks.

"An entity with a quasi-banking license should ensure investor suitability and proper risk disclosure because they're basically providing deposit substitute," Espenilla said.

A quasi-bank with license from the BSP can issue domestic debt securities like promissory notes, corporate papers and reverse repurchase (repo) instruments to finance the securities portfolio. This means that these institutions, like banks, can borrow money from the public.

Under existing laws, an institution which taps more than 19 lenders is considered as borrowing money from the public.

"They should disclose that their products have no PDIC (Philippine Deposit Insurance Co.) coverage, as well as the risks involved," Espenilla added. "This is basically to strengthen consumer protection."

The requirement on investor suitability will allow quasi-banks to distinguish between investors who are already familiar with financial instruments, and those who can not tell a mutual fund from a subordinated debt paper, he said.

"It's meant to prevent ordinary investors from being abused," Espenilla said.

The BSP imposed a moratorium on quasi-banking activities of investment houses and finance companies after several players failed during the 1980s.

But now that the BSP has again liberalized the quasi-banking licensing window, the banking regulators are under pressure to ensure that fresh licensing will be limited to able practitioners, while stronger consumer safeguards are put up.

ESPENILLA

Foreign buying at PSE surged 191% in '06

ICTSI enters 2007 with ₱338-M buy

By Riza T. Olchondra

INTERNATIONAL CONTAINER TERMINAL Services Inc. kicked off 2007 with the purchase of a majority stake in Davao Integrated Port and Stevedoring Services Corp. (DIPSSCOR), a subsidiary of Aboitiz Transport System Corp. (ATSC), for P337.53 million.

In a disclosure dated Dec. 29, ICTSI told the stock exchange that the acquisition of the 90.7-percent stake was made through holding company Abbotsford Holdings Inc. (AHI), which ICTSI established to house its investments in the Philippines.

The Aboitiz company said in a separate disclosure that it expected to realize a net gain of about P290 million from the sale and that the proceeds would be used to further reduce interest-bearing debt.

The Aboitiz group is one of the largest and most diversified corporations in the country with business interests spanning various industries such as power, banking, food production, property development, construction, shipbuilding and resort operations.

The transaction is subject to the approval of the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA).

DIPSSCOR has a 10-year contract with the PPA to provide cargo handling services at the Sasa International Port in Davao City.

Enrique K. Razon Jr., ICTSI chair and chief executive officer, said in a statement yesterday that the acquisition was in line with ICTSI's thrust to expand its operational reach not only abroad but also in the Philippines.

ICTSI currently operates four terminals in the country: its flagship Manila International Container Terminal, NDS Terminal at the Subic Bay Freeport, Bauan Terminal in Batangas and Makar Wharf in Gen. Santos City.

Abroad, ICTSI operates the Baltic Container Terminal in Poland, Suape Container Terminal in Brazil, Naha International Container Terminal in Japan, Madagascar International Container Terminal in Madagascar, Makassar Container Terminal in Indonesia and Tartous Container Terminal in Syria.

On other investments, ICTSI said its board of directors had approved the conversion of ICTSI's advances to International Container Terminal Holdings Inc. (ICTHI) into deposits for future stock subscription in ICTHI.

The converted advances amounted to P725.65 million.

HORSING AROUND
Baguio children, who reside near the pony corral at Wright Park, get to spend their holidays watching tourists race each other around the horse track. The small, colorful ponies are the park's main attraction. Baguio tourism increased significantly in 2006, according to Reinaldo Bautista Jr., acting mayor of the country's summer capital. VINCENT CABREZA/INQUIRER NORTHERN LUZON

As foreign inflows grew, trading also picked up

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

NET FOREIGN BUYING IN THE stock market last year surged 191.2 percent to hit P68.53 billion from P23.53 billion in 2005, according to preliminary figures from the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE).

Net foreign buying is computed as the difference between the total value of stocks bought and sold by foreign investors.

PSE president Francis Lim said in a statement that the increased interest of foreign investors was one of the major reasons behind the growth in the market last year, the fastest in 13 years.

"The market's superb performance in 2006 is proof that economic reforms being implemented by government, specially its efforts to manage the budget deficit, tame inflation and stabilize interest rates have once again paid off," Lim said.

PSE's preliminary data showed that total foreign buying in 2006 increased 68.7 percent to P349 billion, from P206.88 billion in 2005.

Total foreign selling, on the other hand, reached P280.47 billion, 53 percent higher than P183.35 billion during the previous year.

As foreign inflows to the market grew, trading also picked up.

PSE figures showed that the total value turnover in 2006 amounted to P572.63 billion, 49.3 percent higher than the P383.52 billion in 2005.

Daily value turnover averaged P2.32 billion or 48.7 percent higher than P1.56 billion in 2005.

The PSE index (PSEi) closed at 2,982.54 in 2006 or 42.3 percent higher, from 2,096.05 in 2005. The 2006 index level was its best finish after it hit 2,990.96 points on April 7, 1997.

The index also posted its fastest growth rate in 2006 since it recorded a 154-percent annualized hike in 1993.

With the surge in the PSEi, the market's capitalization—or measure of a firm's value based on current market price—also advanced.

Total market capitalization of all listed firms in 2006 reached an all time high of P7.17 trillion, or 20.6 percent higher than P5.95 trillion in 2005. Of the total, market capitalization of listed domestic firms or those based here, amounted to P3.35 trillion, or 57.4 percent higher than the P2.13 trillion level in 2005.

Those considered foreign companies listed on the bourse are the likes of Manulife Corp. and Sunlife of Canada.

"The PSE has high hopes that the market will replicate, if not surpass, its performance in 2006," Lim said.

OFWs in Taiwan to get break with new hiring program

By Ronnel W. Domingo

FILIPINO WORKERS WILL FIND IT easier to go back to Taiwan if the proposed revisions in the island's hiring program will be approved.

Labor attache Reynaldo C. Gopez of the Manila Economic Cultural Organization said officials from Taipei and Manila were reviewing the proposed revisions in the Special Hiring Program for Taiwan or SHPT, which allows Taiwan employers to directly hire Filipino workers without going through labor brokers and middlemen.

Gopez said the proposed new version of the SHPT would ease the rehiring of Filipinos through simplification of procedures in the Council of Labor Affairs, Taiwan's labor department; establishment of a one-stop action center for SHPT matters at the CLA, and re-issuance of re-entry permits for Filipinos rehired under the program.

Gopez said Taiwan was a unique labor-importing country in that it allows manpower agencies to exact fees on foreign workers, including placement fees and monthly services fees.

SHPT, a Philippine initiative, was introduced in 1994 and has been renewed every two years.

Gopez said a standard contract in Taiwan was good for two years and can be renewed for a third year.

The foreign worker can be rehired but only after leaving Taiwan—for as long as another three years to complete the maximum allowable six years of employment.

Meco data showed that there were about 337,000 foreign workers in Taiwan, of which 27.5 percent or some 92,000 were Filipinos.

Of the OFWs in Taiwan, a quarter are rehires.

About 60,000 OFWs work in factories, mostly in semiconductors and electronics firms; nearly 1,500 in construction projects; at least 800 in fishing firms; some 29,000 are caregivers or nursing aides, and about 1,200 are domestic helpers.

The SHPT originally covered factory workers but this was later extended to caregivers and domestic helpers.

Through the program, OFWs going to Taiwan need only to pay for documentation costs, including processing fee, membership with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, Medicare premium, passport (if none), visa, medical examination, a clearance from the National Bureau of Investigation and air fare.

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Court stops payment to Maynilad creditors

By Christine A. Gaylican

A QUEZON CITY JUDGE HAS stopped the initial debt payment to three creditors of Maynilad Water Services Inc. for their refusal to submit a vital requirement that would have completed the turnover of the west zone water concession to the winning bidder.

Judge Reynaldo B. Daway of QC Regional Trial Court Branch 90 yesterday ruled that Maynilad's lenders—Deutsche Bank, Avenue Asia and Maynilad shareholder Suez Environment (formerly Ondeo Services)—should not receive the scheduled debt payment of $3 million until they have given their reasons why they chose not to submit their consent to the transaction between the government and the consortium of DMCI Holdings and Metro Pacific Corp.

The consortium won last year's bid to acquire the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System's 84-percent stake in Maynilad and operate the Metro Manila water facility servicing the west zone.

Maynilad's lead counsel Reagan de Guzman earlier said that MWSI is supposed to settle some of its obligations to the lenders today under the debt and capital restructuring agreement (DCRA) with the government.

In yesterday's court proceedings, Daway ruled out the motion of Maynilad's creditors that they be given at least seven days to study the matter.

Daway instead gave the three lenders until Jan. 3 to formally submit their comments.

The MWSS, as represented by the Office of the Government Corporate Counsel led by Justice Agnes Devanadera, earlier told the court that the three creditors had forfeited their rights when they failed to submit their written consent within a prescribed period.

Citem pushes knowledge process outsourcing

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERvices firms are shifting to higher value ventures while the real estate sector expects a sustained boom with the continuous rise in demand for office spaces in established, as well as emerging, business centers across the nation.

According to the Center for International Trade Exhibitions and Missions, "knowledge process outsourcing" would be promoted in this year's e-Services Philippines, or ESP conference and exhibitions, in an effort to drive up specialization and competence among the firms.

Citem executive director Felicitas Agoncillo-Reyes said promoting KPO would enable IT firms to move up the value chain and establish niches in high-value outsourcing.

Citem organizes the yearly ESP fair, which Reyes said has developed into a major regional outsourcing event for providers of business process outsourcing (BPO) services since it was started seven years ago.

The conference will be held Feb. 15-16 at the Edsa Shangri-La Hotel in Mandaluyong City.

"This year's event is being promoted throughout Asia as a platform for investors, clients, and service providers to explore opportunities," Reyes said.

In a related development, real estate services firm CB Richard Ellis Philippines said business opportunities for the local commercial real estate industry would continue to "expand at an exponential rate" largely on the strength of growth in the BPO sector.

World Bank data showed that Philippine BPO export revenues increased from about $500 million in 2003 to at least $2.5 billion in 2006, according to Albert Briones, associate director for CBRE Philippines.

Briones said growth in BPO has stimulated activity in the local property sector, contributing to its rebound in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis that began in 1997. *Ronnel W. Domingo*

to be young • to be you • to be young • To be you!

2bU!

LIFESTYLE

Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

Chief of Correspondents Pam Pastor

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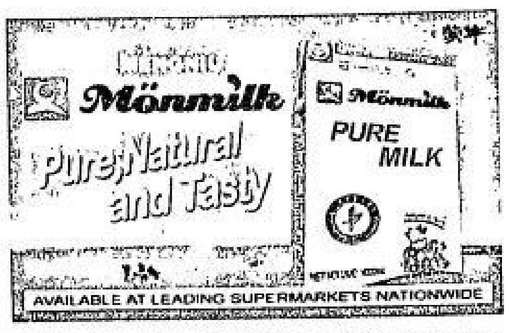

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Fearless forecast 2007

Last week, we turned back time. This week, we're gazing into our crystal ball to tell you who and what are going to be big in 2007—the fashion, the music, the technology and the people. No doubt about it, 2007 is going to rock

Promising people

These local talents will be bigger, better and more famous by 2007, so help us God

By Nino Mark M. Sablan
2bU! Correspondent

THEIR NAMES MAY NOT BE HOUSEHOLD ONES AND THEIR faces may not be on billboards yet. But bursting with passion and blessed with good looks, these local talents will be bigger, better and more famous this 2007, so help us God.

Iwa Moto

With her feisty personality, charming *chinita* looks and whistle-worthy figure, this "Starstruck" runner-up is destined to attract a lot of attention (both good and bad). If she plays her game correctly, she could end up as a big winner this year.

Rhian Ramos

She came out of nowhere in 2006, making her TV debut via "Captain Barbell" followed by a couple of commercial endorsements. Watch out for this drum-playing headturner this year as she wins more TV fans with her 2007 GMA-7 show "Lupin."

Isabel Oli

This charming commercial model-turned-actress bagged a couple of good endorsements last year, but her most recent deal—as Cinderella's new image model—certainly puts her on the road to bigger things.

Noelle Hernandez

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Sitti

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Yeng of 'Pinoy Dream Academy'

The show wasn't very entertaining. The contestants didn't look promising. Thank God a gem came out of the whole thing! Yeng, with her adequate voice and songwriting skills, is a welcome addition to the country's music industry.

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Jeli Mateo

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Pow of 'Philippine Idol'

Being different, especially in show business, is something not easily accepted hereabouts. But based on the reaction of the judges and the viewers of "Philippine Idol," Pow might just prove that the country is ready to welcome and embrace real talent despite height, appearance and sexual orientation.

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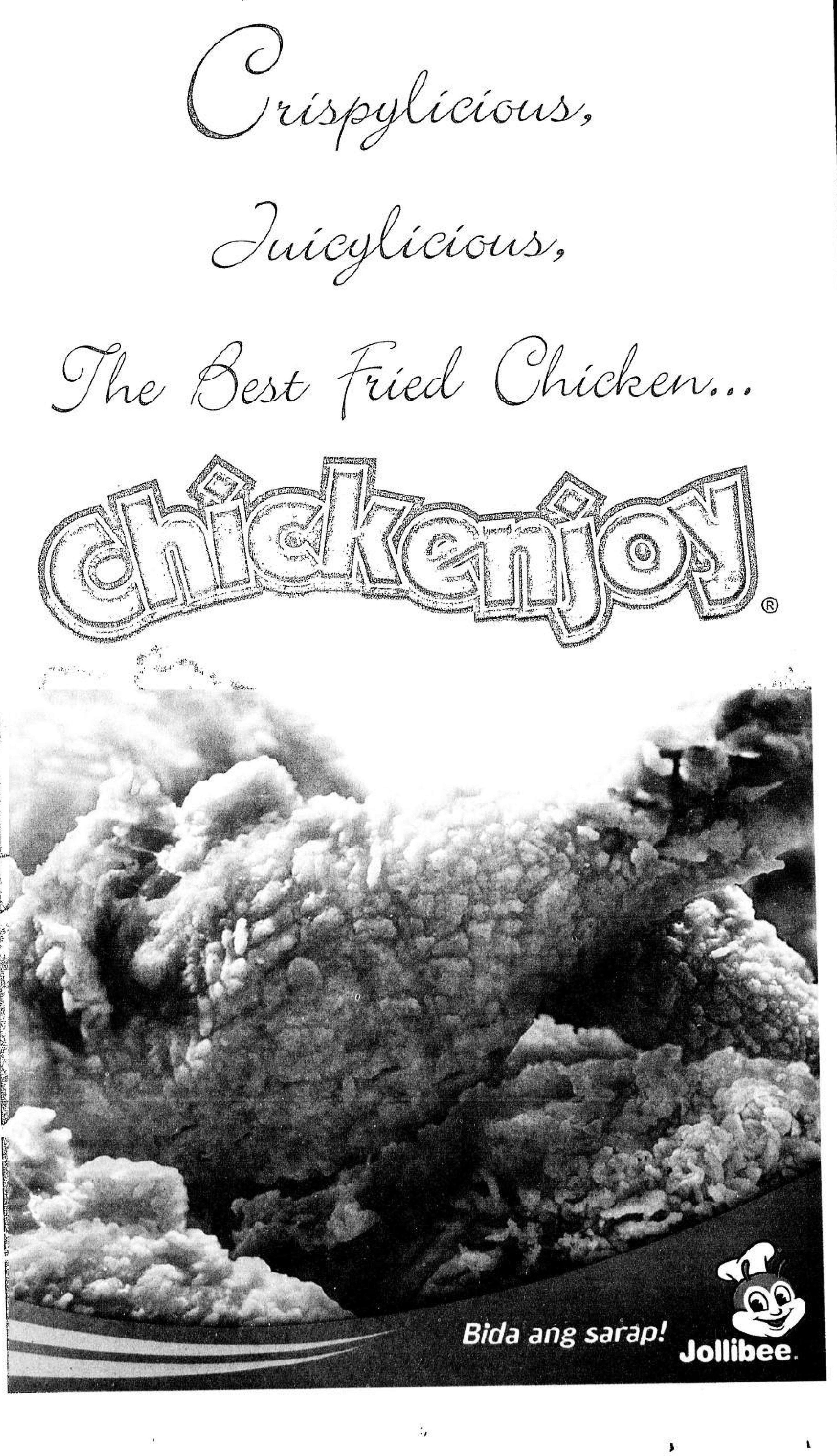
E-mail the author at marksablan_2bu@yahoo.com



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LifeStyle

Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso** Chief of Correspondents **Pam Pastor**

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Mönmilk Pure, Natural and Tasty Mönmilk PURE MILK AVAILABLE AT LEADING SUPERMARKETS NATIONWIDE

Fearless forecast 2007

Last week, we turned back time. This week, we're gazing into our crystal ball to tell you who and what are going to be big in 2007—the fashion, the music, the technology and the people. No doubt about it, 2007 is going to rock

Promising people

These local talents will be bigger, better and more famous by 2007, so help us God

By Nino Mark M. Sablan
2bU! Correspondent

THEIR NAMES MAY NOT BE HOUSEHOLD ONES AND THEIR faces may not be on billboards yet. But bursting with passion and blessed with good looks, these local talents will be bigger, better and more famous this 2007, so help us God.

Iwa Moto

With her feisty personality, charming *chinita* looks and whistle-worthy figure, this "Starstruck" runner-up is destined to attract a lot of attention (both good and bad). If she plays her game correctly, she could end up as a big winner this year.

Rhian Ramos

She came out of nowhere in 2006, making her TV debut via "Captain Barbell" followed by a couple of commercial endorsements. Watch out for this drum-playing headturner this year as she wins more TV fans with her 2007 GMA-7 show "Lupin."

Isabel Oli

This charming commercial model-turned-actress bagged a couple of good endorsements last year, but her most recent deal—as Cinderella's new image model—certainly puts her on the road to bigger things.

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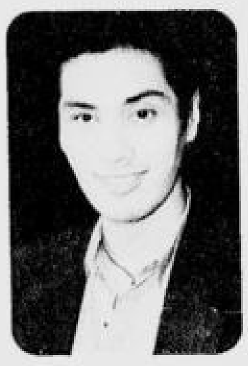

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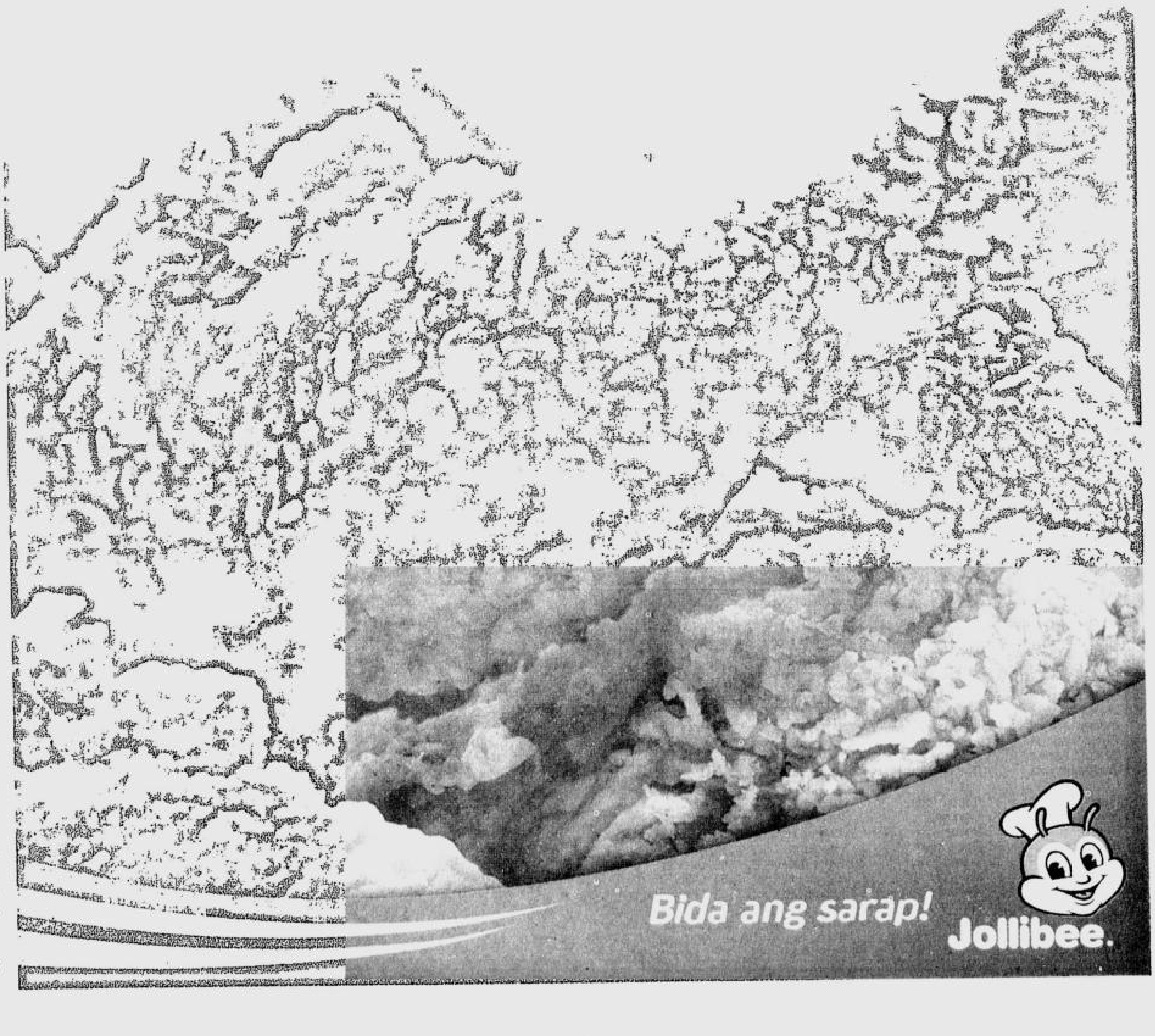
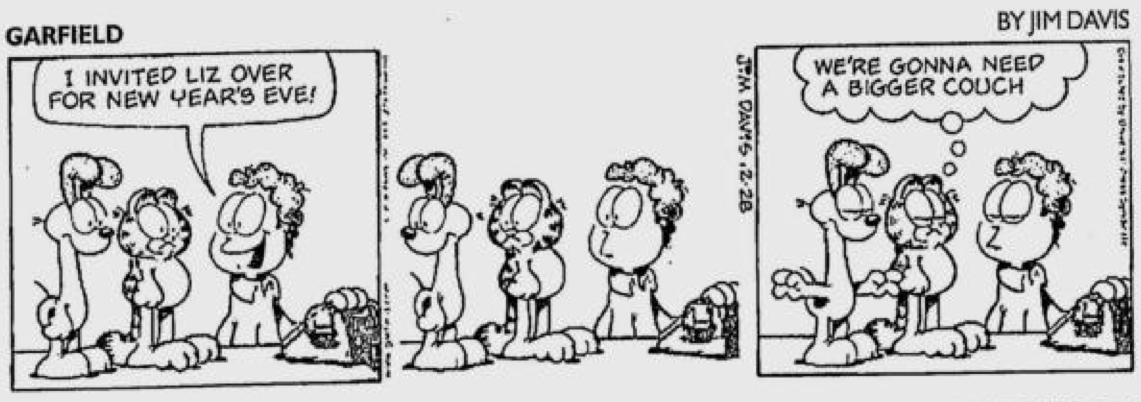


Crispylicious,
Juicylicious,
The Best Fried Chicken...
Chickenjoy®
Bida ang sarap!
Jollibee.

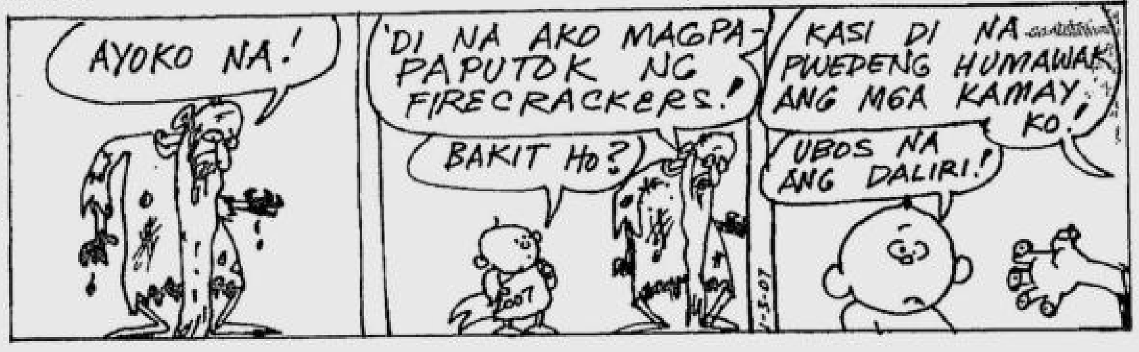
GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS


I INVITED LIZ OVER FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE!
WE'RE GONNA NEED A BIGGER COUCH
JIM DAVIS 12-28

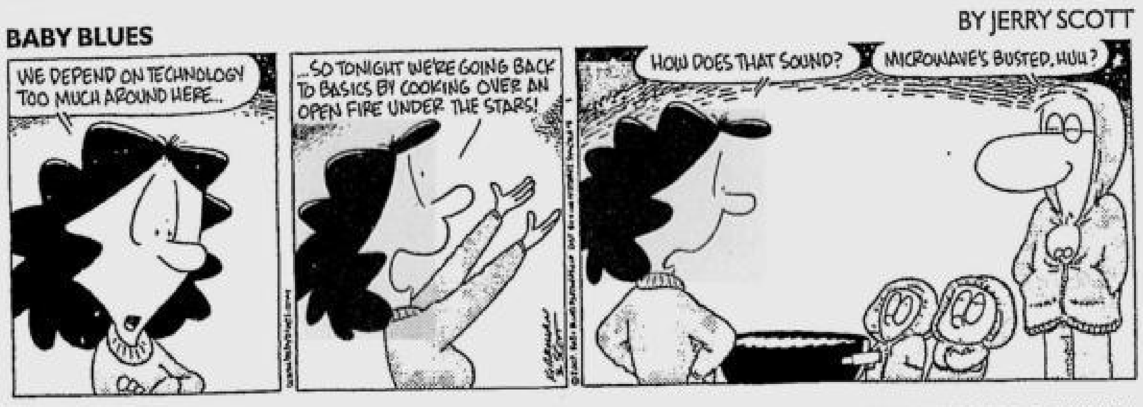
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


AYOKO NA!
'DI NA AKO MAGPAPAPUTOK NG FIRECRACKERS!
BAKIT HO?
KASI DI NA PWEDENG HUMAWAK ANG MGA KAMAY KO!
UBOS NA ANG DALIRI!
2007
1-3-07

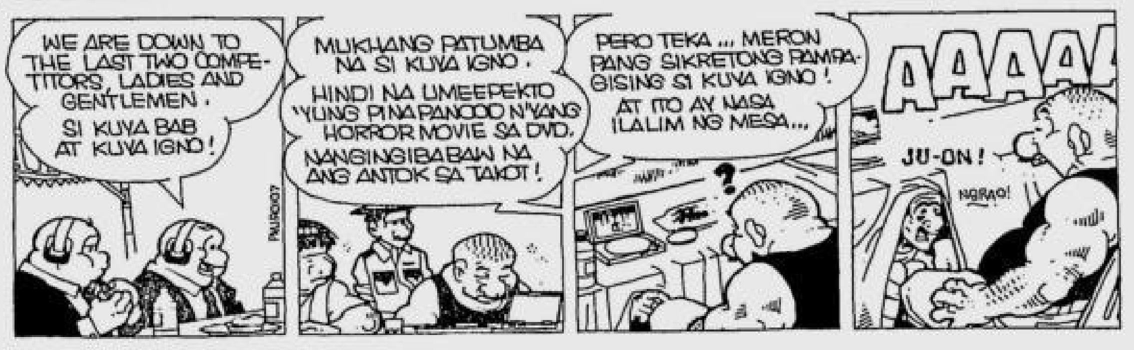
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


WE DEPEND ON TECHNOLOGY TOO MUCH AROUND HERE...
...SO TONIGHT WE'RE GOING BACK TO BASICS BY COOKING OVER AN OPEN FIRE UNDER THE STARS!
HOW DOES THAT SOUND?
MICROWAVE'S BUSTED, HUH?

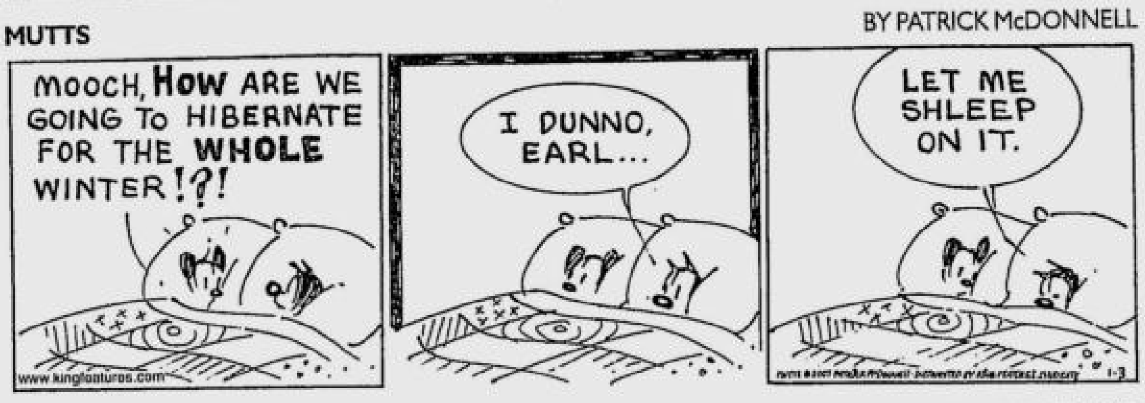
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


WE ARE DOWN TO THE LAST TWO COMPETITORS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. SI KUYA BAB AT KUYA IGNO!
MUKHANG PATUMBA NA SI KUYA IGNO.
HINDI NA UMEEPEKTO 'YUNG PINAPANOOD N'YANG HORROR MOVIE SA DVD. NANGINGIBABAW NA ANG ANTOK SA TAKOT!
PERO TEKA... MERON PANG SIKRETONG PAMPAGISING SI KUYA IGNO! AT ITO AY NASA ILALIM NG MESA...
?
AAAA!
JU-ON!
NGRAO!

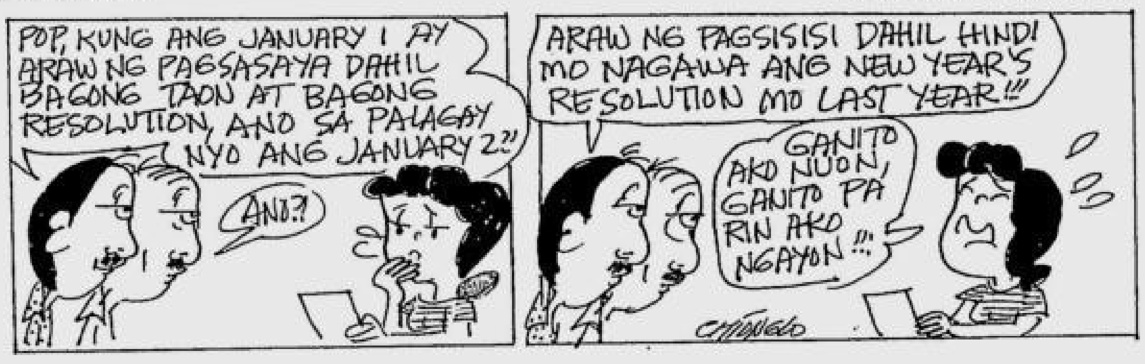
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


MOOCH, HOW ARE WE GOING TO HIBERNATE FOR THE WHOLE WINTER!?!
I DUNNO, EARL...
LET ME SHLEEP ON IT.
www.kingfeatures.com
1-3

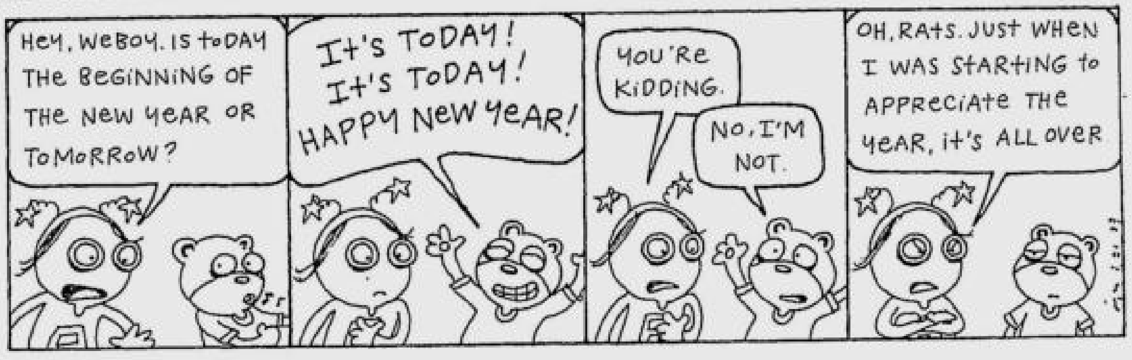
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


POP, KUNG ANG JANUARY 1 AY ARAW NG PAGSASAYA DAHIL BAGONG TAON AT BAGONG RESOLUTION, ANO SA PALAGAY NYO ANG JANUARY 2?
ANO?!
ARAW NG PAGSISISI DAHIL HINDI MO NAGAWA ANG NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION MO LAST YEAR!!!
GANITO AKO NUON, GANITO PA RIN AKO NGAYON!!!
CHIONGLO

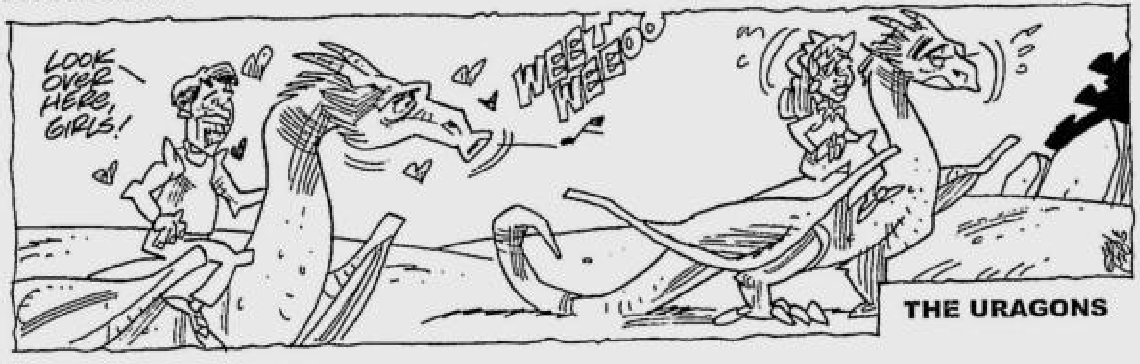
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


HEY, WEBOY. IS TODAY THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR OR TOMORROW?
IT'S TODAY! IT'S TODAY! HAPPY NEW YEAR!
YOU'RE KIDDING.
NO, I'M NOT.
OH, RATS. JUST WHEN I WAS STARTING TO APPRECIATE THE YEAR, IT'S ALL OVER

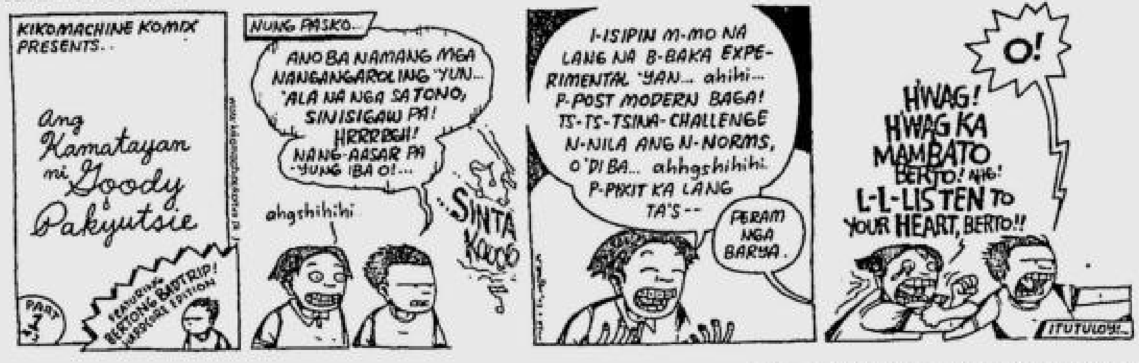
DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


LOOK OVER HERE, GIRLS!
WEET WEEOO
THE URAGONS

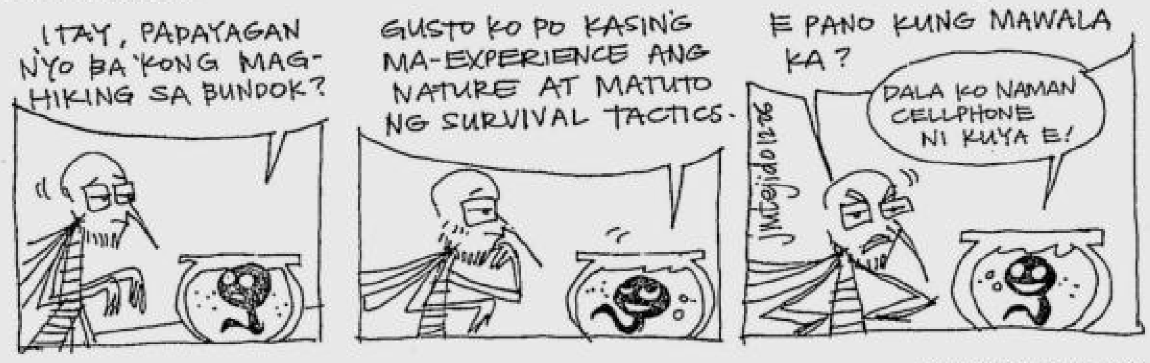
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


KIKOMACHINE KOMIX PRESENTS..
ang Kamatayan ni Goody Pakyutsie
PART 1 of 3
FEATURING BERTONG BADTRIP! HARDCORE EDITION
NUNG PASKO..
ANO BA NAMANG MGA NANGANGAROLING 'YUN... 'ALA NA NGA SA TONO, SINISIGAW PA! HRRRGH! NANG-AASAR PA 'YUNG IBA O!...
ahgshihihi
SINTA KOOO
I-ISIPIN M-MO NA LANG NA B-BAKA EXPERIMENTAL 'YAN... ahihi... P-POST MODERN BAGA! TS-TS-TSINA-CHALLENGE N-NILA ANG N-NORMS, O'DI BA... ahhgshihihi. P-PIKIT KA LANG TA'S--
PERAM NGA BARYA.
O!
HWAG! HWAG KA MAMBATO BERTO! NIG! L-L-LISTEN TO YOUR HEART, BERTO!!
ITUTULOY...

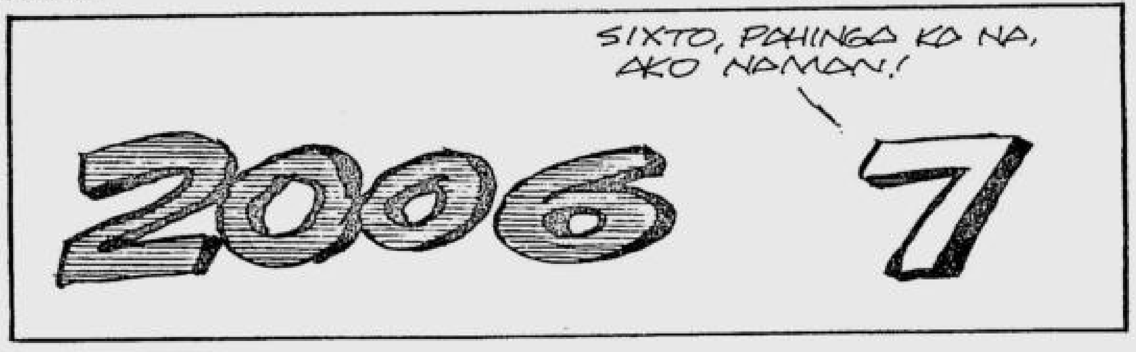
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


ITAY, PAPAYAGAN N'YO BA 'KONG MAG-HIKING SA BUNDOK?
GUSTO KO PO KASING MA-EXPERIENCE ANG NATURE AT MATUTO NG SURVIVAL TACTICS.
E PANO KUNG MAWALA KA?
DALA KO NAMAN CELLPHONE NI KUYA E!
JMtejido 12.26

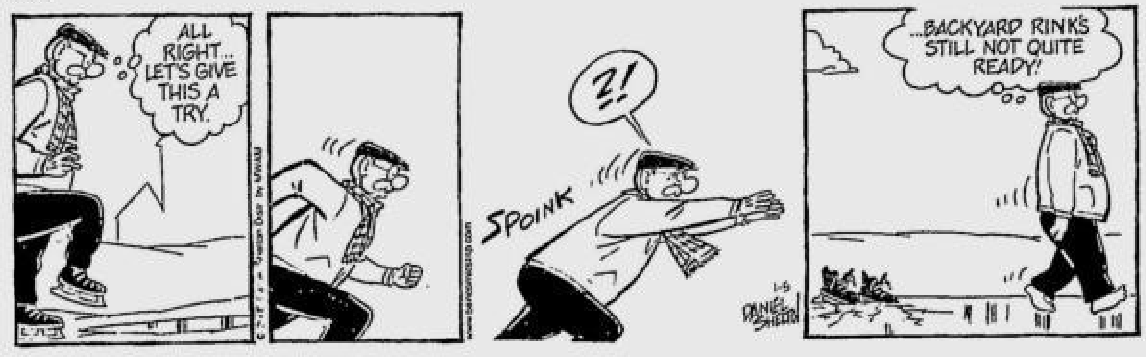
TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING

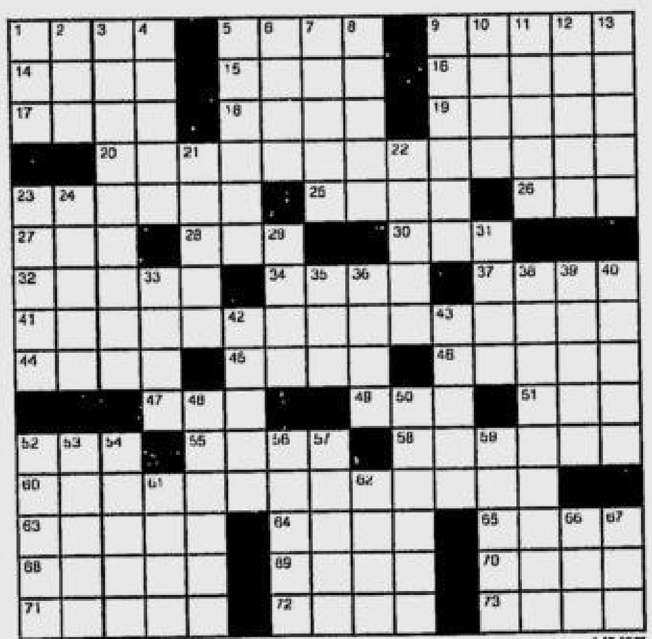

SIXTO, PAHINGA KA NA, AKO NAMAN!
2006
7

BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


ALL RIGHT... LET'S GIVE THIS A TRY.
SPOINK
?!
...BACKYARD RINK'S STILL NOT QUITE READY!
DANIEL SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD


By Philip J. Anderson
Portland, OR
1/3/07

ACROSS
1 Formal agreement
5 Pesters
9 Mechanical man
14 Borodin's "Prince __"
15 Land portion
16 Sun-dried brick
17 Anna Sten movie
18 Drink in one gulp
19 Lunch spot
20 Hanky panky at the aquarium?
23 Japanese religion
25 Game units
26 Bishopric
27 Highland helper
28 Q-U link
30 So that's it!
32 Former Mrs. Trump
34 Abba of Israel
37 Morales in movies
41 Hanky panky at the mint?
44 External: pref.
45 Strongly advise
46 French philosopher
47 "Car Talk" broadcaster
49 Director Craven
51 Rock composer Brian
52 Make a move
55 Goals
58 Simple shed
60 Hanky panky at the arboretum?
63 Conical abode
64 Walked heavily
65 Wallpaper unit
68 Obliterate
69 Fully grown
70 Slaughter in Cooperstown
71 Actuary's computations
72 Small bills
73 Zounds!

DOWN
1 Wrestler's goal
2 Turkish title
3 Trusted associate
4 Work out
5 Mexican menu item
6 Painful
7 Digs for food
8 Transition
9 Root for salads
10 Valhalla host
11 Tibia and femur
12 Fat
13 Effectively concise
21 Lose one's way
22 Remain in force
23 Slug's trail
24 Devastation
29 Rip
31 Saab model
33 Sign gas
35 Pester
36 Once more
38 Deceptively alluring appeal
39 Regarding
40 Snowy dwelling
42 Gruesome
43 German steel center
48 Names on checks
50 Slurs over in pronunciation
52 Fall flower
53 Oteri of "SNL"
54 Spanish hors d'oeuvres
56 Paris subway
57 Deadly poison gas
59 Concur
61 Office workplace
62 Easy gait
66 Mauna __ volcano
67 Leary's acid

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved

E	G	G	S	■	C	R	U	D	■	B	L	E	A	K
C	L	A	W	■	H	A	R	E	■	E	E	R	I	E
H	O	P	A	L	O	N	G	C	A	S	S	I	D	Y
O	P	E	N	U	P	■	E	A	S	T	■	C	E	E
■	■	■	K	I	S	S	■	L	E	O	T	A	R	D
W	H	E	Y	■	U	H	F	■	A	F	R	■	■	■
A	I	R	■	S	E	A	L	S	■	A	E	I	O	U
S	K	I	P	P	Y	H	A	N	D	L	E	M	A	N
H	E	C	H	E	■	S	K	O	A	L	■	A	F	T
■	■	■	O	A	R	■	E	O	S	■	A	M	S	O
M	C	E	N	R	O	E	■	T	H	A	T	■	■	■
A	R	A	■	M	A	N	N	■	I	R	O	N	I	C
J	U	M	P	I	N	J	A	C	K	F	L	A	S	H
O	D	E	O	N	■	O	M	N	I	■	L	I	L	A
R	E	S	E	T	■	Y	E	N	S	■	S	L	E	D

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1/3/07

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You give 100 percent of yourself to whatever you endorse. You become involved with every detail. You have a strong sense of duty; you don't shirk your responsibilities. Although sometimes a little stubborn, you're extremely persuasive. You're a great storyteller. It's important to work hard to build or construct something in the year ahead. Your rewards will soon follow.

Birthdate of: Mel Gibson, actor; Bobby Hull, hockey player; Jeanne Moreau, actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Today's Full Moon forces you to make a choice between home and career. It will be tough to keep both areas of your life satisfied today.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): This is not only a busy day for you, it's an accident-prone day. The Full Moon could cause you to be distracted.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Something related to your possessions, your cash flow or how you earn your money is stressed. Should you focus on your finances or the wealth of others? Tough call.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): This is the only Full Moon in your sign all year. It will likely affect your sleep. (Have patience.)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Something having to do with your job or your relationship to coworkers is challenging today. It's as if you're not quite sure where to put your energy.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): You feel pulled between the demands of children or romantic partners versus friends, clubs, groups and organizations. You can't keep everyone happy, but you certainly can't ignore the needs of children.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): There is a bit of a tug-of-war between the demands of your job and the demands of your home life. However, at this time, you have to stay on top of your home and family scene.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Be careful. This is an accident-prone day. You might need more patience when talking to relatives, siblings or neighbors. Keep in mind that everyone is dealing with the stress of today's Full Moon.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): You might have to make a choice between your own possessions or the possessions and wealth of somebody else. However, you can't ignore your own needs at this time.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Today's Full Moon opposes your sign. This brings increased stress to your closest relationships and partnerships. The good news is that this stress diminishes by tomorrow! (Whew!)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You might feel restless today because of the Full Moon. Don't worry—once the Full Moon peaks, your stress will immediately start to fall away. (Thankfully.)

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Be extra-patient with friends and children today. Everyone can feel emotional hype from today's Full Moon. This particular Full Moon is in Cancer, the sign most connected with the Moon.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

	9	5	7				4	8
		6	2	4		3	9	
				3		6		
			1	7	3			
		1				9		
8	6		9				7	
2							6	
	4	9	6				3	
			8	9			2	

Difficulty Level ★★★ 1/03

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

6	9	8	3	7	5	4	2	1
2	7	4	1	8	9	5	6	3
3	5	1	2	6	4	9	7	8
8	4	3	7	9	2	1	5	6
9	1	5	6	4	8	7	3	2
7	6	2	5	1	3	8	4	9
4	3	6	8	5	1	2	9	7
1	2	9	4	3	7	6	8	5
5	8	7	9	2	6	3	1	4

Difficulty Level ★★

Beauty and style, coming soon

This year brings more feminine and romantic looks, with low-rise jeans taking a backseat to figure-focused clothing

MAKE a fashion leap with futuristic pieces.

SHEER, gauzy fabrics equal romance.

TRIBAL-INSPIRED pieces are hot.

GO FOR bright colors like yellow and cobalt-blue.

By Bianca Consunji
2bU! Correspondent

ALTHOUGH A LOT OF retailers and fashion designers ape foreign trends, it's simply impossible to have a drastic change of trends in the Philippines. People who wear velvet coats, leather jackets and turtlenecks in feebly air-conditioned malls simply look ridiculous any which way you look at them.

Because of this, a lot of trends from past years stubbornly cling to new fashion seasons. Staples such as shorts, tank tops, mini skirts and jeans are simply shortened, lengthened or embellished.

Thankfully, for the past few years, designers and retail stores have learned to be more experimental. There are less basic tees and flared jeans (which, incidentally, burst into the scene in 1998; if they're all you ever wear, that's not a good sign), and more dresses and embellished tops.

This year brings more feminine and romantic looks. Low-rise jeans will have to take the backseat as figure-focused clothing makes a comeback.

According to Style.com, cinched wide belts, full skirts and baby-doll dresses are some of the trends to look out for this year. You also might want to keep last year's staple, shorts, in your closet this 2007.

"Legs will be the feature item of the summer," said Sheree Gotuaco, owner of retail stores Freeway and Ensembles. "We will be carrying short shorts in different silhouettes, from bloomers to hot pants."

"Versatile shirt dresses, which can be worn with leggings or skinny jeans, will also be hot. We will also be carrying baby-doll dresses, swimsuits in graphic and animal prints, and hooded sportswear."

SHU UEMURA'S Paradox collection emphasizes pink cheeks and strong eyebrows.

PHOTOS FROM WWW.STYLE.COM

Cosmopolitan magazine fashion editor Katrina Dy provided 2bU! with her top eight trends for 2007. They are:

1. Futuristic fabric. Bring out the shiny and synthetic clothes!

"Silver will be big," Dy said. "Pair it with white."

If you don't want to look like you just stepped out of "2001: Space Odyssey," limit your metallics to a few accessories or as trimming on your clothes. If you're daring, go all out in a metallic dress, but hold the space helmet.

2. Florals, from prints to appliqués. Go girly with the most feminine print in town.

3. Bright colors like yellow, orange and cobalt blue. Don't be afraid to put on a splash of color.

4. Graphic prints inspired by abstract artists. It's Picasso's turn to shine.

5. Tribal-inspired clothing. "Go for khaki, red, and mustard hues and easy, relaxed shapes," said Dy. Pair this trend with more feminine pieces like fitted jeans to avoid looking like Hiawatha.

6. New romance: sheer, gauzy fabrics and pastels. We still couldn't get over "Marie Antoinette." Go for flowing skirts, cinched waists and delicate details on your dresses.

7. Sportswear. "The trapeze silhouette will be big in dresses and tops."

8. Short dresses. "This is one of my favorite trends. They're perfect for traveling in the summer since they're easy to pack and wear," noted Dy. "As for footwear, go for flats and wedges."

The romantic look will also prevail in the beauty front as major cosmetic brands are poised to offer sweet looks for the first quarter of 2007.

BABY-DOLL dresses are back.

"It's all about pink cheeks and strong eyebrows," said Xeng Zulueta, chief makeup artist of Shu Uemura Philippines.

"Our Spring/Summer Paradox collection carries a lot of sweet pinks and very subtle colors. The look is sweet, but it makes a statement at the same time."

Zerline Chan, brand manager of Lancôme Philippines, said: "Our spring collection, called Pop Cherub, is inspired by "Marie Antoinette," but with a twist. Think of her using an iPod and you'll have a mischievous angel. Look out for pastel green and pink eyes lined with silver glitter. Pair it with peach blush and a nude stain."

There are also some departures from the girly-girl look. "The big thing for 2007 is androgyny—thick eyebrows and clean skin," said Jigs Mayuga, head makeup artist of L'Oreal Philippines.

"For L'Oreal, the main colors are green and gray. Also, for our Spring/Summer collection, the colors to look out for are gold and silver, especially in our eyeshadows."

E-mail the author at biancaconsunji@yahoo.com

Music matters

Some thoughts and predictions for Pinoy music in 2007

By Luis Katigbak
Reviews editor, Burn magazine

PLAYING MUSICAL Nostradamus is a tricky game. Setting aside the fact that sappy ballads and irritating novelty hits will always be with us in one form or another, it's hard to say with much certainty how long the public will be enamored of a certain musical style.

Possibly the first question to ask now is: How long will the current Pinoy rock resurgence last? Most of us still remember how rock ruled in the early to mid-'90s, and how the record-buying public's tastes shifted after that.

More recently, we saw how trends—like the Paolo Santos-led acoustic craze of 2003—could seem dominant one year, and then quickly slip into obscurity the next.

The current rock resurgence is about three years old. Pinoy rock favorites like Bamboo, Kitchie Nadal and Hale have landed giant billboard ads, done commercial jingles, been lauded at awards shows.

New bands have been springing up, and more than a few of them show great promise.

The rock scene, in other words, is pretty healthy, in terms of mainstream acceptance. One can hope that things only get better and better, but experience indicates that these things come in cycles.

One prominent producer/performer I know pegged that it would all be over by 2008. Another performer, the lead guitarist of a band on a major label, said: "The sooner it ends, the better, so we can go back to the underground where we belong."

ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY MISTADES

Self-styled realists would have it that the end is nigh. However, mainstream acceptance of rock is greater now than it was even in the '90s (although one could argue that this is due to the toothlessness of many of the popular rock acts now).

Teenagers and young adults seem more involved and informed when it comes to music than before; that's an interest that will likely carry over as they get older and gain more purchasing power.

And of course, electronic distribution and promotion changes the rules, too. So here are some thoughts and predictions for 2007:

1 **BIG GUNS.** New albums by prominent acts like Orange and Lemons, Bamboo, 6cyclemind and Kitchie Nadal—all slated for release early next year—will keep mainstream interest high and the pop-rock scene dominant.

2 **NEW SOUNDS.** Bossa nova singer Sitti proved that charm, talent, solid performances and some well-chosen covers could generate massive album sales and revive an unexpected genre. With interest in music in 2006 extending to such varied genres as the accessible yet uncompromising electronica of Drip; the Latin/hip-hop/electro fusion of Nyko Maca; the off-the-wall reggae of Junior Kilat; the rock/jazz/neo-soul stylings of Up Dharma Down; and the happy retro-pop of Juan Pablo Dream, audiences have proven more open to diversity, and you can expect another breakthrough star. (Our eye is on soulful singer/songwriter Julianne).

3 **EVOLUTION.** Young, immensely talented bands that made their mark in 2006—like Up Dharma Down and Hilera—are only getting started; expect greater things from them soon. Even bands that have been around a bit longer aren't content to rest on their reputation. Witness the continuing evolution and relevance of Sandwich and Imago. Perhaps the year's most startling reinvention belonged to Narda, who recently released their fierce, fast-paced second album "Discotillion." We feel they could conquer the country, given proper promotion and distribution.

4 **COMPETITIONS.** Singing contests, and the resulting winners' albums, will continue to make my head hurt.

5 **REMAKES.** With the Eraserheads and APO Hiking Society tribute albums such great successes, expect more tributes, of varying quality. Already slated for next year are tributes to VST & Co., the Juan de la Cruz Band and possibly The Dawn.

6 **NEW MEDIA.** With an increasing number of sites and services offering local music for download on your mp3 players and cell phones, music will weave itself into our day-to-day lives more than ever. We'll probably have an Internet-driven success story—a la Lily Allen or the Arctic Monkeys—soon, whether via MySpace or otherwise.

7 **EXPANSION.** With the better major labels beefing up promotion of their local acts, with more media interest and coverage of the music scene, and with such events as the relaunch of MTV Philippines scheduled for next year, the scene seems destined to get bigger.

For better or worse, less and less acts are going the DIY independent route that was so popular just a few years ago, and are holding out instead for major label deals.

As always, a number of local acts are also looking to establish themselves overseas. South Border, for example, has already set up shop in the States, and Drip has been the subject of international interest as well.

One thing seems certain. Just as there were always bands and artists that made their own way even when mainstream acceptance and approval of their art was basically zero, the most devoted, talented and stubborn acts will always survive. That means we'll never run out of good stuff to listen to, which is as it should be.

Luis Katigbak is Reviews editor of Burn, the magazine for music features, reviews, coverage and music-related lifestyle stuff. A free CD comes with every issue. He is also the senior editor of the music website Pulse.ph. Burn's fifth issue comes out this month.

Future Tense

What is technology going to be like this year? Here are exciting developments to watch out for

By Gabriel H. Mercado
2bU! Contributor

THIS YEAR, LOOK FORward to gadgets which are friendlier to users and to each other, a World Wide Web that offers more audio-video possibilities, and a big tech scandal or two. Plus, there's the question of whether you should upgrade to Vista.

Vista, the latest software wonder from Microsoft, is scheduled to be launched this February, which is big news not only to Microsoft, but to the business community as well.

Big computer manufacturers will get to release special Vista models at the same time, while software developers will release Vista versions of their products.

PS3

At approximately $600 for the top model, the Sony PlayStation 3 is more expensive than some mid-range laptops. When it comes to gaming gear, it's also harder to beat.

While the Xbox has more games and the Nintendo Wii is cheaper, the PS3 offers Blue Ray movies, high-definition games, backward compatibility with older models and is plain ease to use.

Wireless connectivity. Wires are so early 2000s. While Bluetooth or Wi-Fi has been around for some time, technology will go even further this year with digital cameras and cell phones that automatically detect and connect with each other, with your PC or with your laptop, quickly and without wires. Common problems of slow connection speeds and limited range are expected to be ironed out this year.

DSL

Since everyone has cell phones, the landline telephone is definitely kaput. So why would one still want to go through a landline application? Because for some telecom companies, it's the only way to get DSL. DSL is arguably still the fastest, most reliable and practical broadband solution for the home user, and is much preferred over cable and Wi-Fi.

Telecoms which offer DSL without need for a landline will eventually enjoy greater customer patronage, which is just right.

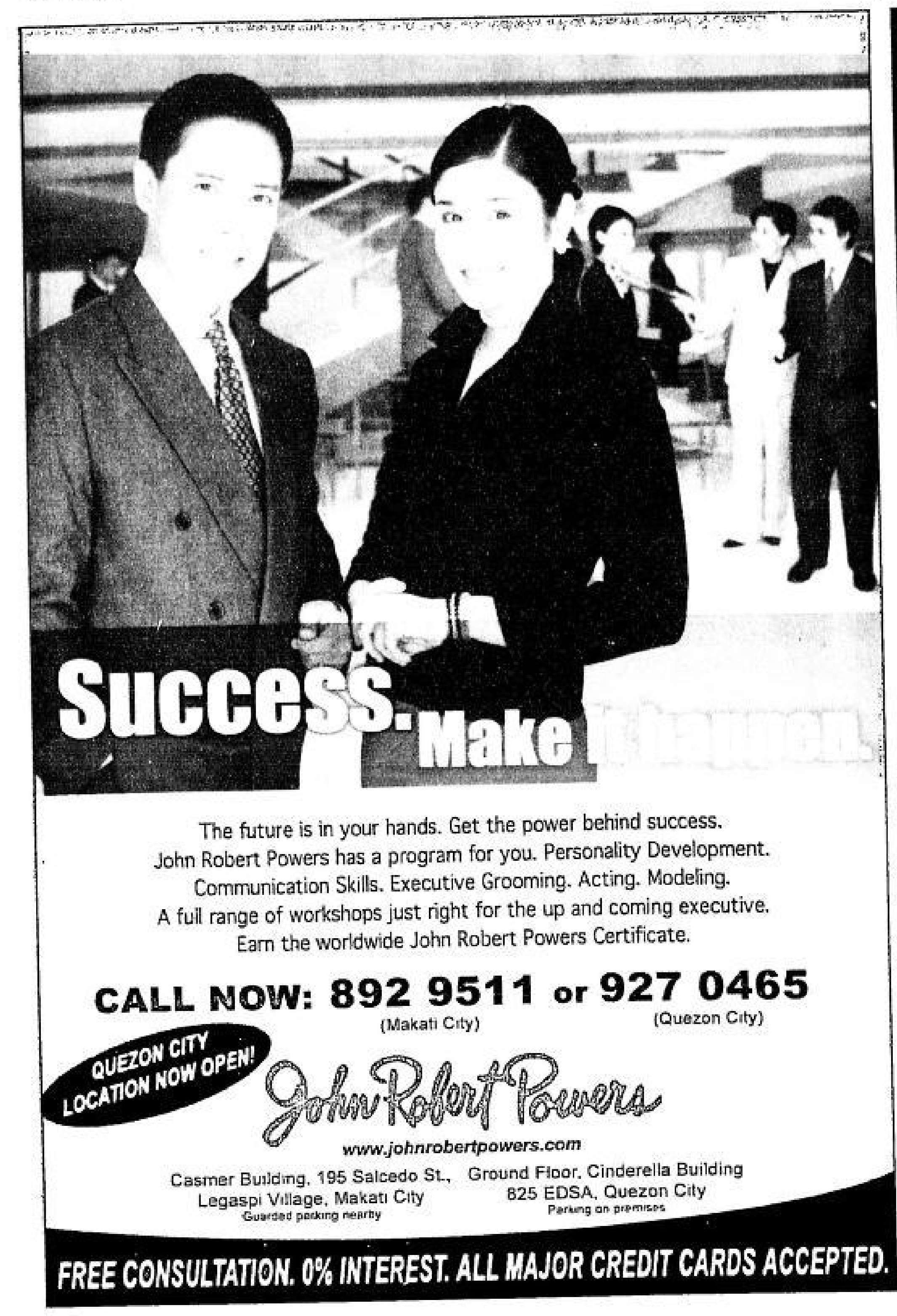
Movie blogs. As blogs are mostly text-driven, writers with wit and personality have had a natural advantage. However, they're not the only ones who want to voice out opinions. Fortunately, faster, more accessible broadband, cheaper video and image recorders, bigger file storage, and easier blogging tools are helping bloggers express themselves with more variety through graphics, images, video and audio. Prepare for a more exciting online experience.

Scandals

No thanks to camphones and cheap webcams, people's private moments called "scandals" have been broadcast over Internet mailing lists and websites at a volume unlike any before 2006.

If Time Magazine considers the content-generating user as the Person of the Year, then it's obviously to the benefit of the voyeur. This being being an election year, not only will we have more scandals, but someone really famous and/or influential may just be caught on-cam doing something nasty.

Paypal. Isn't it ironic that the Philippines, which is heavily dependent on Overseas Filipino Workers' money, doesn't have PayPal support? PayPal will allow us to market services and compete internationally without leaving our shores, thus empowering hundreds of thousands of businesses. This is something we should have had yesterday. Let it come true this year.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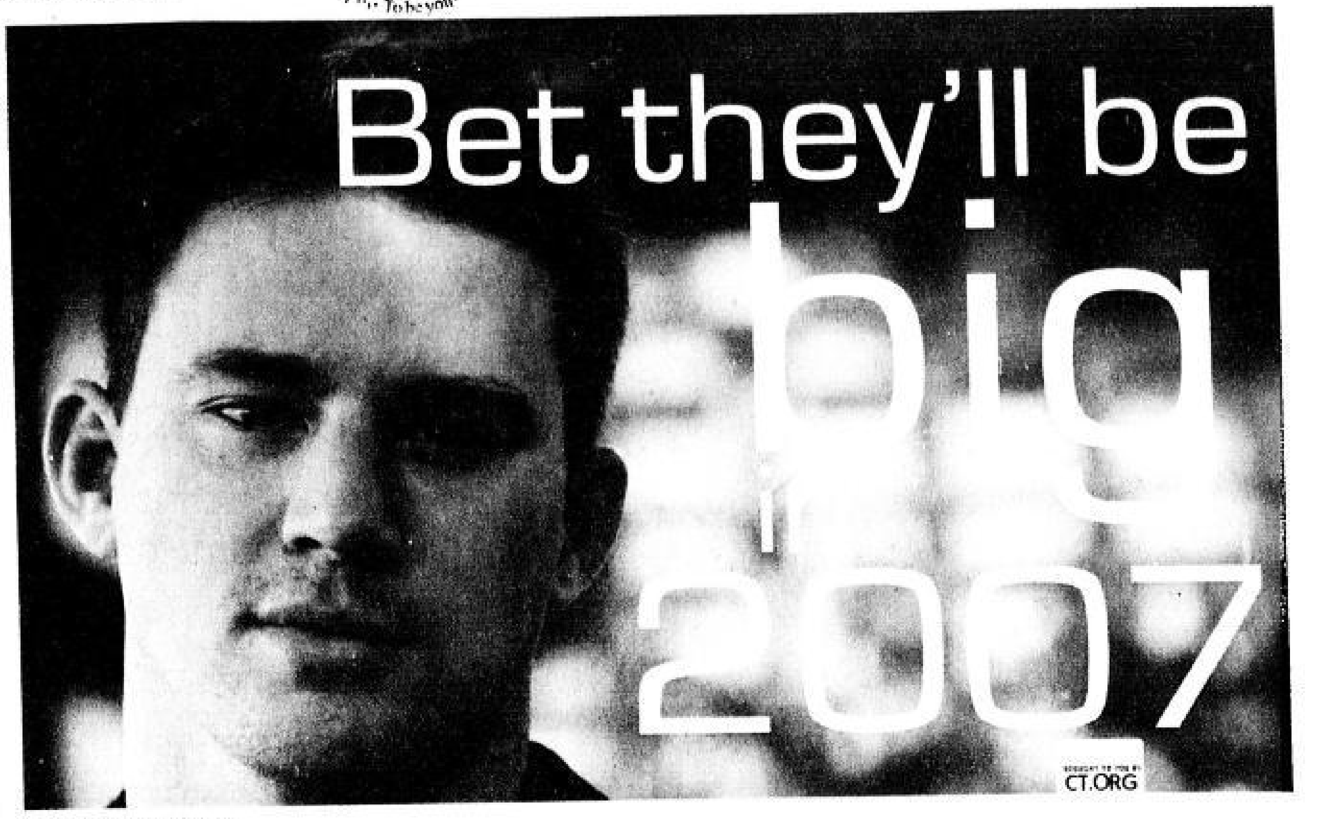


CHANNING Tatum

Watch out for these celebrities as they aim for greater fame and fortune in Hollywood

By Nino Mark M. Sablan
2bU! Correspondent

HOLLYWOOD IS OVERflowing with talented, gorgeous people. While some get lucky and become superstars overnight, many others take a longer route before achieving top-tier status.

The following celebrities made waves in 2006, and with their good looks, undeniable talent, passion and X factor, they are sure to come on even stronger this year!

RIHANNA

Channing Tatum

The big and bald Channing started out in the industry as a print ad model and as an extra in Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" vid, before he launched an acting career. He has appeared in a 2004 episode of "CSI: Miami," in 2005's high school drama "Coach Carter" and 2006's "She's the Man" with Amanda Bynes. Quite easy on the eyes, this hunky looker seems to be headed for a lot of macho roles, starting with the Iraqi war drama "Stop Loss" where he reportedly plays a hotshot fighter from Texas.

Chris Daughtry

He may not have been crowned American Idol last year because of some gray-haired guy, but this certified rocker won't be deprived of fans, tours and good chart positionings. Having won nods from "Entertainment Weekly" and Rob Zombie, Chris recently came out with his album called Daughtry (also the name of his band), which debuted impressively on the charts.

Kristin Cavallari

Our scene-stealer from "Laguna Beach" eased into the entertainment industry pretty fast, appearing in a couple of movies and even getting to host her own reality show called "Get the Party started," which unfortunately got axed faster. Despite this, there seems to be no stopping Kristin. She continues to make more movies, enlarge her fan base and drive more paparazzi into a tizzy.

Rihanna

Not the prettiest face, yeah, but what an amazing voice! This sexy singer came up with a couple of hits in 2006, even winning some big awards. With the right songs and dance moves, she can very well be the next Beyoncé.

Jennifer Hudson

"Dreamgirls" has just showed everyone how talented this girl is. The sparkling movie is proof enough that losing in a contest isn't always the end of the world or of one's fledgling career. Hail Jennifer, the new diva!

Wentworth Miller

If he plays his cards right, Wentworth (what a name!) will be the next Keanu Reeves or Ben Affleck. With his immense success and large fan base via "Prison Break," Wentworth's next logical step should be a successful movie career, and pronto!

John Legend

This child prodigy oozes soul and sex appeal with his songs. There aren't a lot of male singers crooning out there right now, but even with competition, we're pretty sure John Legend can kick their ass. He's deep, he's catchy and he's a sight to look at.

Katherine McPhee

Weight problems and bad song choices aside ("Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "It's All Coming Back To Me Now"), there is no denying the gorgeousness, the presence and the confidence of Katherine. She looked and acted like a real star the first time we saw her on "American Idol." Now, she is even being considered as the next Wonder Woman. Not bad for a newcomer!

Lily Allen

Loved by everyone who hears her, Lily looks cute in an odd sort of way, with her light and feathery voice—a unique sound first heard in her breakthrough single, "Smile." We want to hear more of Lily and we want more people to listen to her this year.

Leona Lewis

Leona is the winner of the first ever "X Factor" talent show from Simon Cowell. Armed with a fantastic voice, a beautiful face and competitive songwriting skills, this promising talent should hit it big in Great Britain and the rest of the world.

Corinne Bailey Rae

She reminds you of Erykah Badu and Macy Gray, though younger and much better-looking. She's got a long way to go, so if she doesn't reach her peak yet this 2007, we won't mind. Her debut album is treasure enough, and award-winning bodies are already taking notice.

Kevin Zegers

Kevin, most noted for his performance in Transamerica, looks like a teen heartthrob even if he's probably way past his teen years. That troubled teen aura, coupled with his acting experience, puts him in the running as the next hot dreamboy for girls and girly guys.

Jesse Metcalfe

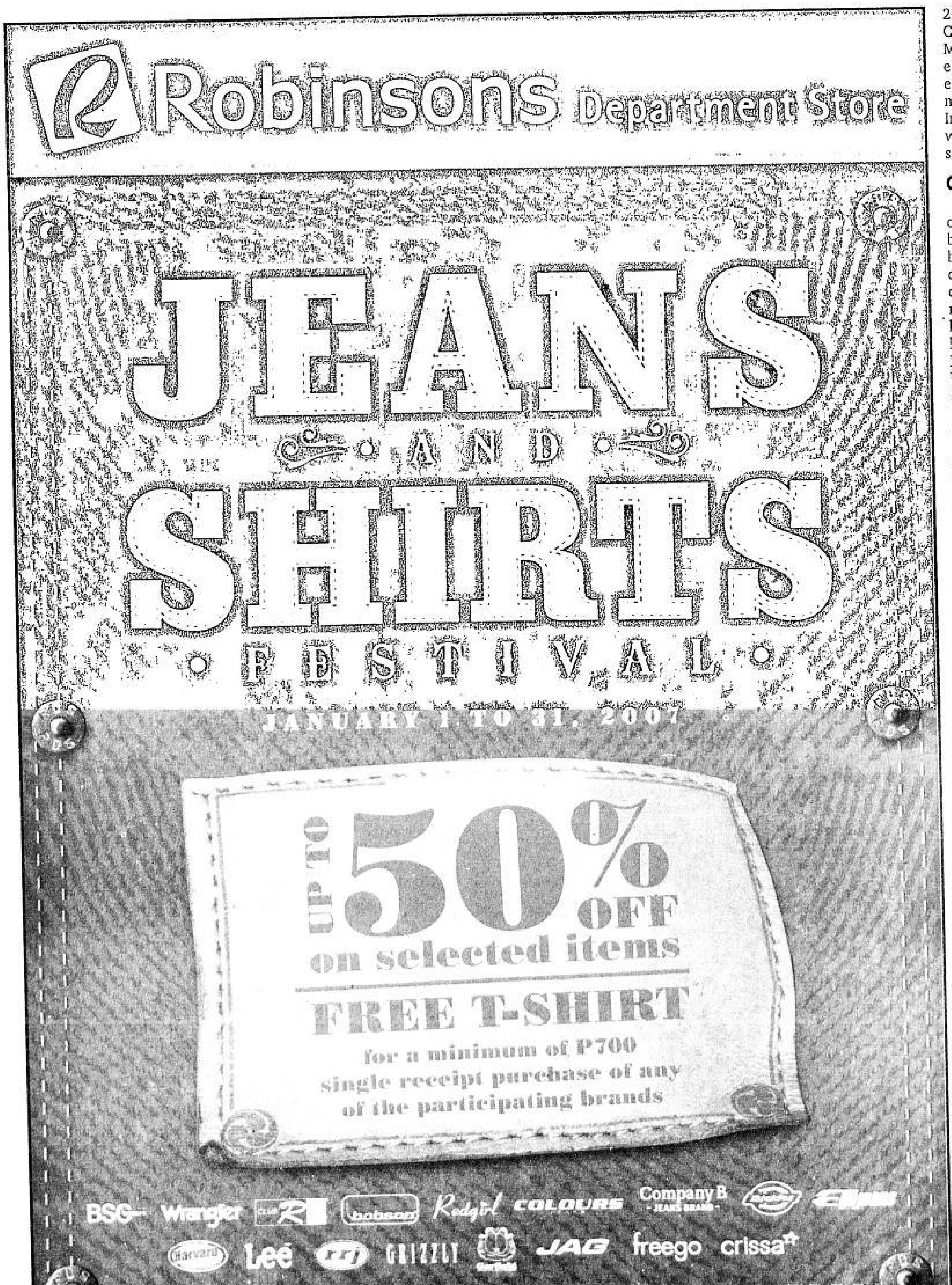
This hunk, who is famous for going topless in "Desperate Housewives" and for his very well-groomed eyebrows, made the right moves last year with his movie "John Tucker Must Die." There are rumors of him being gay, but that shouldn't matter. This Robert Ortega look-alike should capitalize on his hottie status now so 2007 can be a banner year for him.

Dainty Kane

The name might be the worst group moniker ever, but a listen to its first single, "Showstopper" shows that Dainty Kane can potentially exceed the life span of other "Making the Band" products. In fact, something tells us that the girls in this band might actually make it bigger if they pursued individual music careers. For now, time to enjoy the group's catchy first single!

E-mail the author at marksablan@yahoo.com.

KATHERINE McPhee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FUN SNAPS FROM 2006

READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP. She's no diva, Gretchen Barretto insists, and proves it in this snap by PDI's Romy Homillada during the shooting of "Matakot Ka Sa Karma" by doing her own ... touch-up.

How Most Gender-Sensitive Film in MMFF was chosen

By Anna Leah Sarabia
Contributor

THE QUANDARY POSED TO the jurors of an award-giving body by the term "gender-sensitivity" is that, while it connotes an awareness of issues that women's rights advocates have been working on for over a hundred years now, it cannot always assume an understanding of the injustice brought about by the dominance of one group over the rest of humanity, simply because members of this group are born with a penis and have the potential to turn into brutes. Privilege is the natural scheme of things for those who think they are entitled to it.

Centuries ago, when pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Philippine society was characterized by a woman historian to have had "a gender symmetry with mutual power and authority enjoyed by Filipino women and men," the concept of "gender-sensitivity" would have been unnecessary. Today, with the odds in our daily life stacked against equality between women and men, the most that good-governance negotiators can do is to plead to those in power for "sensitivity to gender issues."

And so it goes, too, with those of us who have grown impatient with an information and education system that has not done much to eliminate intolerance for those who cannot conform to unnatural standards of maleness or female-ness, of strength or beauty, of machismo and virginity.

Primitive stereotyping of female and male roles has been taken for granted so long in our culture—and in the film industry—that not only will most people remain blind to such ingrained inequities, but even its intelligent audiences will defend its validity.

Thank God, the formula that Lino Brocka told us he had to follow for his producers in the '80s (sex, rape and violence), is no longer the norm. But in its place, the supposedly "wholesome" Metro Manila Film Festival

HOW MOST/D2

Keith Urban goes back to rehab

SYDNEY—COUNTRY MUSIC singer Keith Urban will head back to the United States to resume his alcohol rehabilitation treatment after a holiday break in Australia with his wife Nicole Kidman, a report said Friday.

The Australian-born Urban, who married Kidman in a lavish ceremony in Sydney early this year, has endured a well-publicized alcohol and drug addition and is now in rehab at the Betty Ford Center in California.

In the past few weeks, he has also been subjected to allegations by 23-year-old US model Amanda Wyatt that he has been conducting an affair with her since his June 25 marriage to Kidman. *AP*

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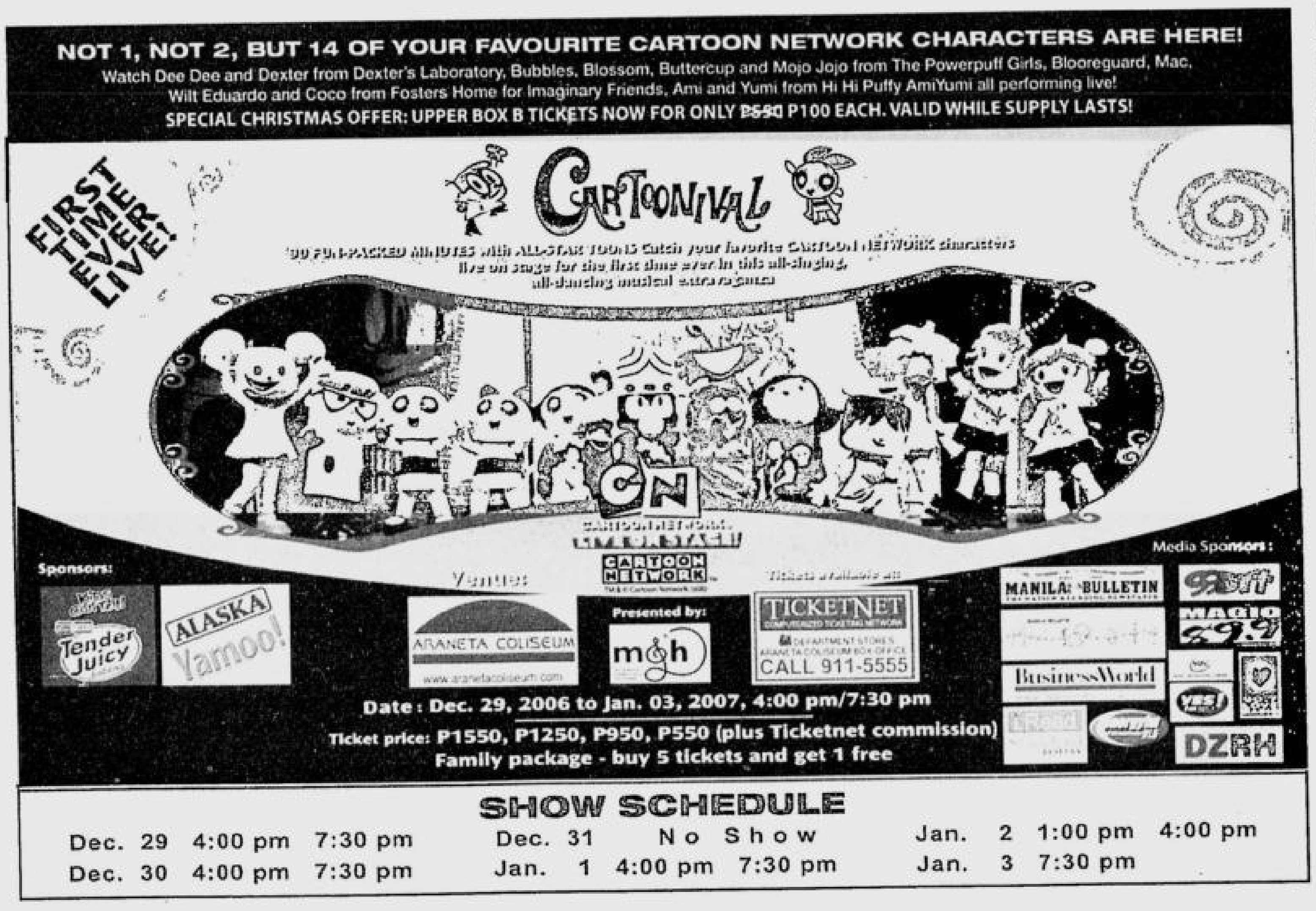

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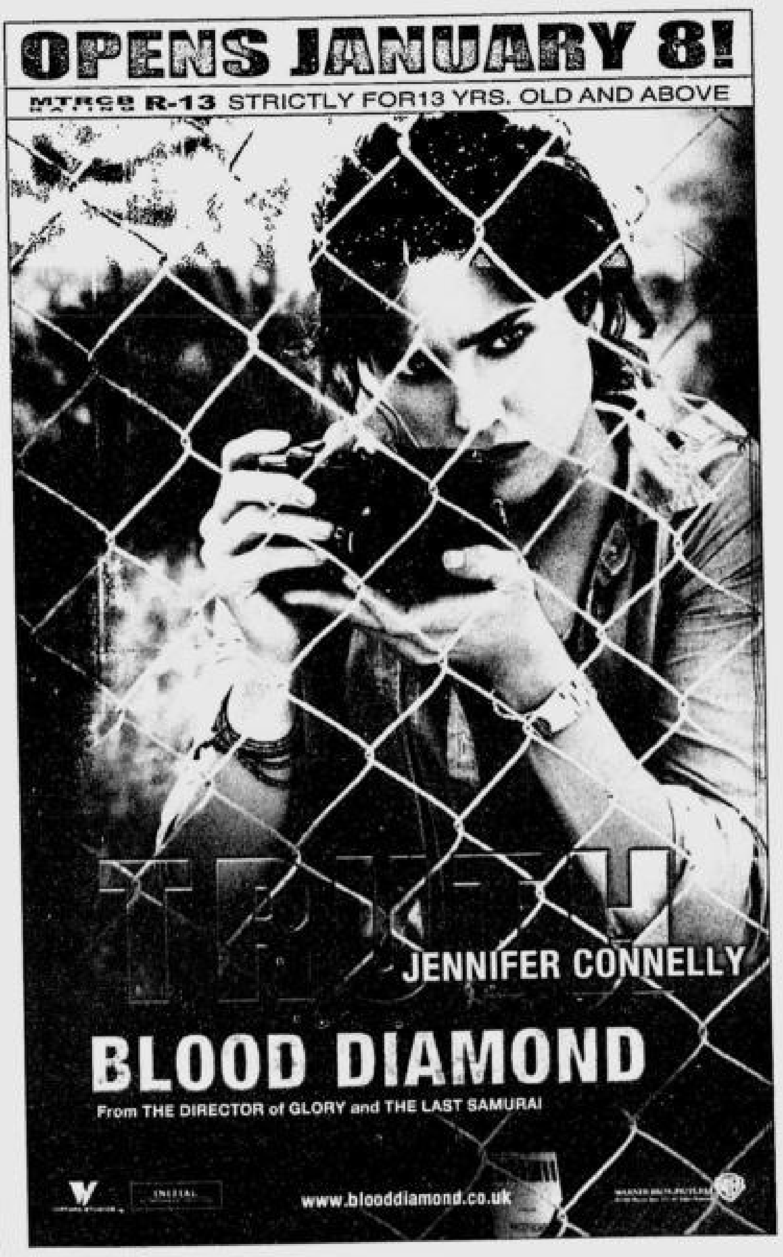

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2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO 1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8 1:20 4:10 7:00 9:50
4 MANO PO 5 12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3 12:20 2:45 5:10 7:35 10:00
6 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA 1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
7 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH 12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
8 SUPER NOYPI 12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
9 TATLONG BARAHA 1:20 3:30 5:40 7:50
10 LIGALIG 1:20 3:30 5:40 7:50 10:00

ERMITA 536-7809 to 12
1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3 10:10 12:35 3:00 5:25 7:45 10:00
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2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3 11:25 1:55 4:25 6:55 9:20
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH 10:45 1:20 3:55 6:30 9:05
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5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA 10:50 12:50 2:50 4:50 6:50 9:00
6 MANO PO 5 10:20 1:00 3:40 6:20 9:00
7 LIGALIG 12:50 2:50 4:50 6:50 9:00
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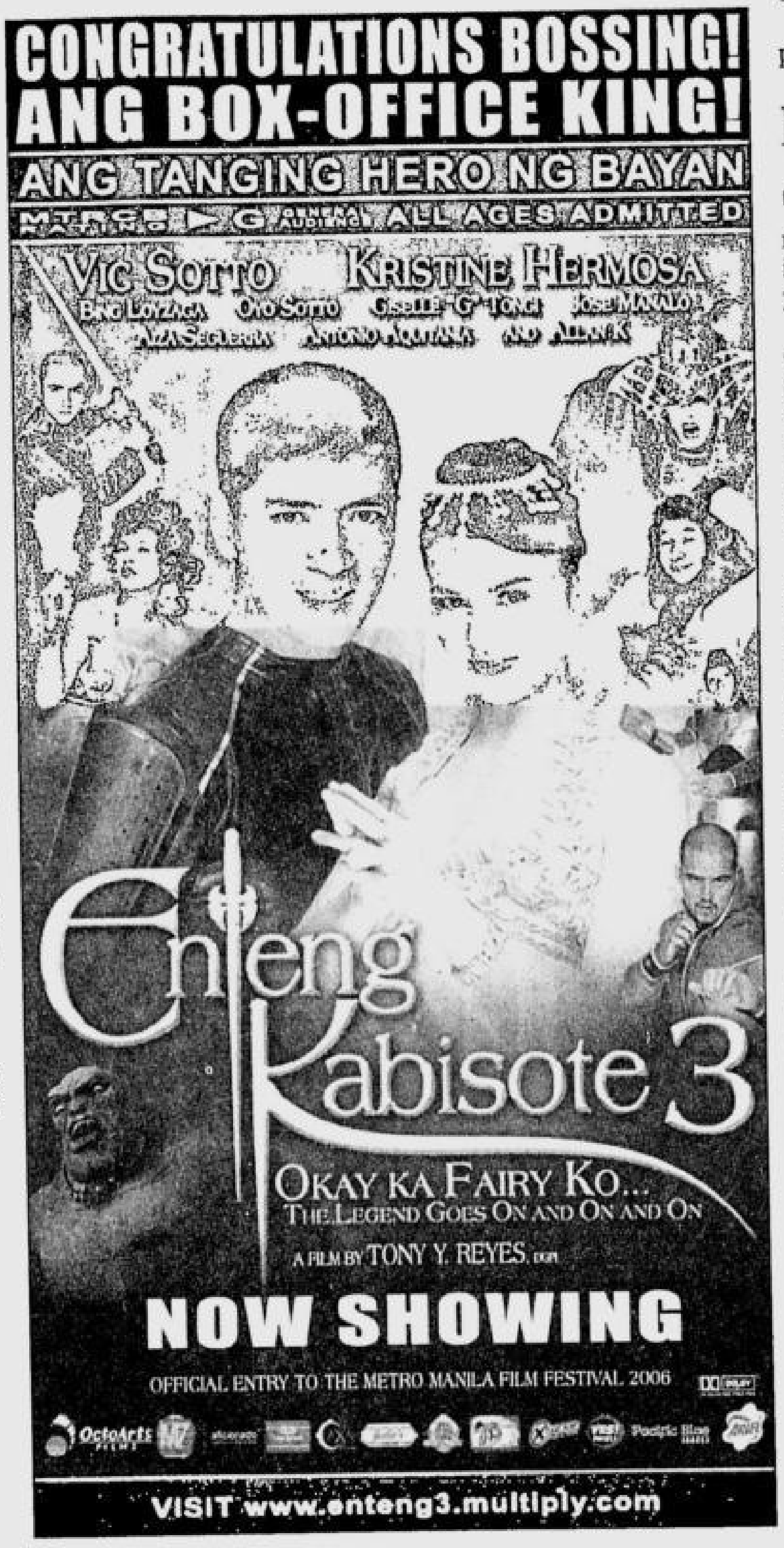
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EVEN BEFORE THE CURRENT Metro film fest opened last Dec. 25, the word was out in industry circles that it was going to be the most "visually effective" edition of the festival, ever.

However else the MMFF pans out in other departments like content, box office and quality, the special effects of many of its fantasy, horror and adventure flicks are standouts.

This is good news for effects aficionados, but not so good for the movies' actors, who have to work even harder to make sure they aren't thoroughly upstaged by the visual flash and flourish!

In the past, actors were warned against performing with children and animals—now, they can add special effects to the cautionary list!

Second chances

On US TV, the current big deal is pageant owner **Donald Trump**'s de-
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In fact, Trump
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some people are
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versial likes of P
Cruise, Mel
Spears and—Ge

We, too, shoul

How Most Gender-Sensi

From page D1

movies, are littered with stereotypes discriminatory images that will impact negatively on the self-esteem of young people.

The blockbuster "Enteng Kabisote" is propped up by quips offensive to women, girls and gays, and could inspire gay-bashing. Vic Sotto exclaims "*Ay, supot!*" at a laser sword that doesn't lengthen, and a host of uncircumcised young boys in the audience could imagine how they will be ridiculed. In one film, a thin, dark-skinned child and his uncomely mother become the butt of a director's mean joke.

A woman protagonist whose skin is not white enough, or is not thin enough, or pretty enough, and does not scream silly at the sight of a spider or lizard, is not really feminine. A husband who does not degrade his wife with infidelity ("*Tumikim lang ng ibang ulam*"), or who does not beat up other men in defense of his honor (and property), is not masculine enough.

That is why while some films could be acknowledged as more gender-sensitive than others, it does not rid some jurors of a lingering concern for the effects that discriminatory imaging may have on the children and parents that patronize the MMFF.

Why bother?

Why should we be so demanding of the film industry that everyone says is dying and must be given breathing space every Christmastime by the MMFF? Isn't film just like a form of entertainment that we can take or leave? Well, film is a business, yes, and is often times made to amuse audiences. But it is not like a roller-coaster in a theme park.

Film is this century's equivalent of the rituals, dances, songs and dramas that Spanish priests and rulers used to spread a foreign ideology to a captive audience, distort our balanced gender relations, and tear apart of our economic self-sufficiency. We were not conquered simply by gunpowder and warfare. It was with constant propagandizing of *moro-moro* and sermons demonizing our ancient *Bathala* and *babaylan*, about women's sinfulness, and white men's god-given power to rule that the grieving Mater Dolorosa, asexual virgins and the innocent Santo Nino became our dearly favored icons. Film is a powerful endorser of social values and practices. The way women and men deal with each other in movies could become the template upon which moviegoers' relationships are molded.

Directors seem to have to guarantee their producers that a woman who wields a sword and battles evil be-

---

Lovi: Her dad's daughter

From page D4

chummy with her dad's wife Susan Roces and, by extension, with Susan's niece and "Bakekang" co-star Sheryl Cruz.

Lovi coped the best way she knew how—by writing about her experiences, good and bad, in her journal of songs.

LOVI at the PD

"I have a big notebook of
wrote about the not-so-nic
help crying about those issu
one after the other. But th
stronger and inspired me to

She hoped that the public
est, most intimate thoughts"
mitted several to Sony-BMG
they'll choose, though."

Her secret in remaining s
reminding myself that I am
her share of intrigues."

She said she had also m
mongers. "I can't blame th
[for spreading rumors]. I als
business because it has alwa
act."

She also clarified that she
Sheryl.

"I look up to Tita Susan a
are on different sets (on "B
other. It's just that we don't
cause we're both very busy."

She said she has no qualn
had another family before
tress Rowena Moran.

"I am not the only person
of situation," she said. "I a
ground. [It's] because my fa
me. My advice to kids [who a
to remain strong and not to l

Another sure sign of ma
coming-out party when I t
birthday concert. It's more p
whatever I'm supposed to sp

She's now saving up for
"Kain na Poe."

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More show biz tales

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aris Hilton, Tom
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VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

biz people here a second chance. We're too judgmental, and expect others to be perfect, despite the fact that we're so flawed ourselves!

Ayala cinemas

The Ayala cineplexes' decision to exclusively screen some quality movies is paying off. "Marie Antoinette" and "Little Miss Sunshine" have enjoyed good audiences at Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 3 cinemas.

"Marie Antoinette" played for a number of weeks, while the run of "Little Miss Sunshine" was cut off only by the start of the Metro film fest.

This indicates that there's a small but loyal audience out there for quality movies, despite their being relatively modest productions with little star value.

With the Ayala cinemas encouragement, this niche audience can be developed and built up, until it can sustain more quality productions than the occasional few that make it to their screens at present.

Digital circuit

Another positive development in terms of screening venues is SM Cineplexes' development of a small circuit of some nine theaters equipped to screen digital films.

This is an important contribution because the local digital film movement is one of the major factors keeping our movie industry alive.

We also wish that digital filmmakers explore an alternative schools-based circuit for their movies, to reach the huge student audience that is the logical market for edgy digital movies.

Thanks, Cherry Pie

Another fan has written in to express his thanks for his favorite star's outstanding work in 2006: Vic O. Rafisura is all praise for **Cherry Pie Picache**'s "very different and believable" portrayal of a lesbian in "Kaleldo." He believes it will be cited as one of the year's best, and could even win the actress some awards.

What makes Cherry Pie's performance different? Her character's being a lesbian "is only a part of her make-up, which also includes her role as a sister, daughter and friend."

Rafisura also likes the way the actress depicts the lesbian without having to be "macho"—stereotypical approach some other actresses can't seem to get away from.

ive Film was chosen...

ings will not "lose" her femininity—if she fights side by side with the stronger male protagonist, and if she remains beautiful and sexy in all her gear. (Does anyone ever wonder why fairies and female superheroes have to wear skin tight or skimpy costumes? "*Parang magja-Japan*" as Zsazsa Zaturnnah described.)

She can be Gabriela-like, challenge patriarchal tradition, banish a giant frog and zombies, lead her forces against the enemy, but her heart must remain steadfast, soft and forgiving of her man's transgressions if she must be the model of a worthy woman. Despite the enactment of a law criminalizing abuse, humiliation and betrayal against women, the film industry continues to make a wife's acquittal of these acts as prescriptive and admirable. Female characters who have successful careers and businesses, and who could very well find fulfillment in self-actualization, are still presented as vulnerable in the absence of a male partner.

We wonder: Why did one film, in its attempt to uplift the status of oppressed gay men, depict its antagonists as feminist aliens seeking world-domination—when everyone knows that it is male-managed wars and patriarchal empires that are destroying the planet?

In the end it is the capacity of ordinary people—gay, straight, married or single—to take responsibility for choices they make, and determine the course of their own lives, for their own welfare, that increases the possibility of gender equity.

"Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo" did not need a drop-dead glamorous super-hero to prove internal growth and empowerment. It did not need handsome brave-hearted men to display chivalry and or weakness. Rather, it showed us the limitations of our asymmetrical society, using a somewhat flawed lens, and how people struggle to build a life of acceptance and mutual support in our really imperfect, and seemingly unjust world.

The presence of an award for Most Gender-sensitive Film in the MMF has inevitably put women's rights, homophobia, sexuality, gender-identity and family relationships in the radar screen of some Filipino producers. Maybe one day we will see other issues played out without prejudice or anxiety—women's health, family planning, divorce, lesbianism, abortion and the sex life of seniors. Filmmakers are free to ignore gender issues. Or they can embrace a more civilized way of life, and allow all characters in their films to make rational, self-respecting decisions.

The author was a member of the jury that picked this year's Most Gender-Sensitive Film.

anniversary party. RUDY ESPERAS

songs that I composed. I also
stuff," she related. "I can't
s, especially since they came
se problems only made me
write these songs."
would get to hear her "deep-
on her second album. "I sub-
. I don't know which songs

ne in a crazy biz? "I just keep
not alone. That everyone has

de peace with the intrigue-
m. They have their reasons
have my reason. I am in this
s been my dream to sing and

s not at odds with Susan and

a second mom. Sheryl and I
kekang"), but we greet each
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her loved me. My mom loves
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urity? "I will not have a big
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ractical that way. I'll just save
end on my debut."
native restaurant she'll call

Gyllenhalls flee fire in VIP lodge

INVERNESS, CALIFORNIA—A HOLIDAY vacation in Northern California came to an abrupt end for actors Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal when a fire destroyed the country lodge where the siblings were staying.

The Gyllenhaals were among a dozen or so guests who fled Manka's Inverness Lodge after the fire, sparked by a falling tree, broke out at about 3 a.m. (800 GMT) Wednesday. Co-owner Daniel DeLong said the pair were supportive despite the wind and cold.

"Jake was helping me pull things out of the fire," DeLong said.

The lodge and its restaurant were a popular destination for VIPs. Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, dined at Manka's last year, and Frances McDormand and her husband, director Joel Cohen, were there on Christmas Day. *AP*

Pops Fernandez
Rustom Padilla
Alfred VARGAS
Pauleen LUNA
Chokoleit
Christian VAZQUEZ
Say ALONZO
and Zsa Zsa Padilla
Carlo Vergara's
ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH
ZE MOVEEH
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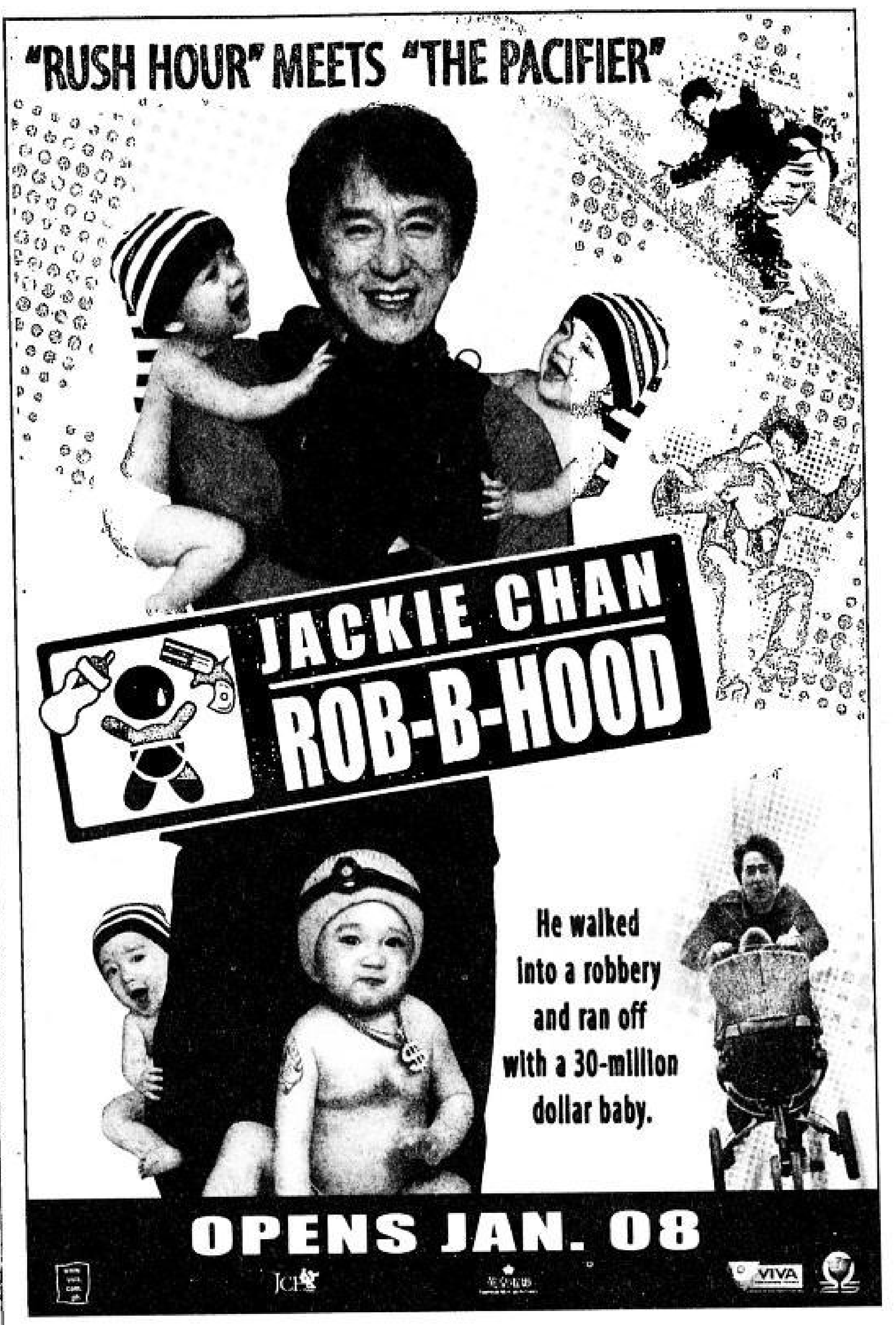
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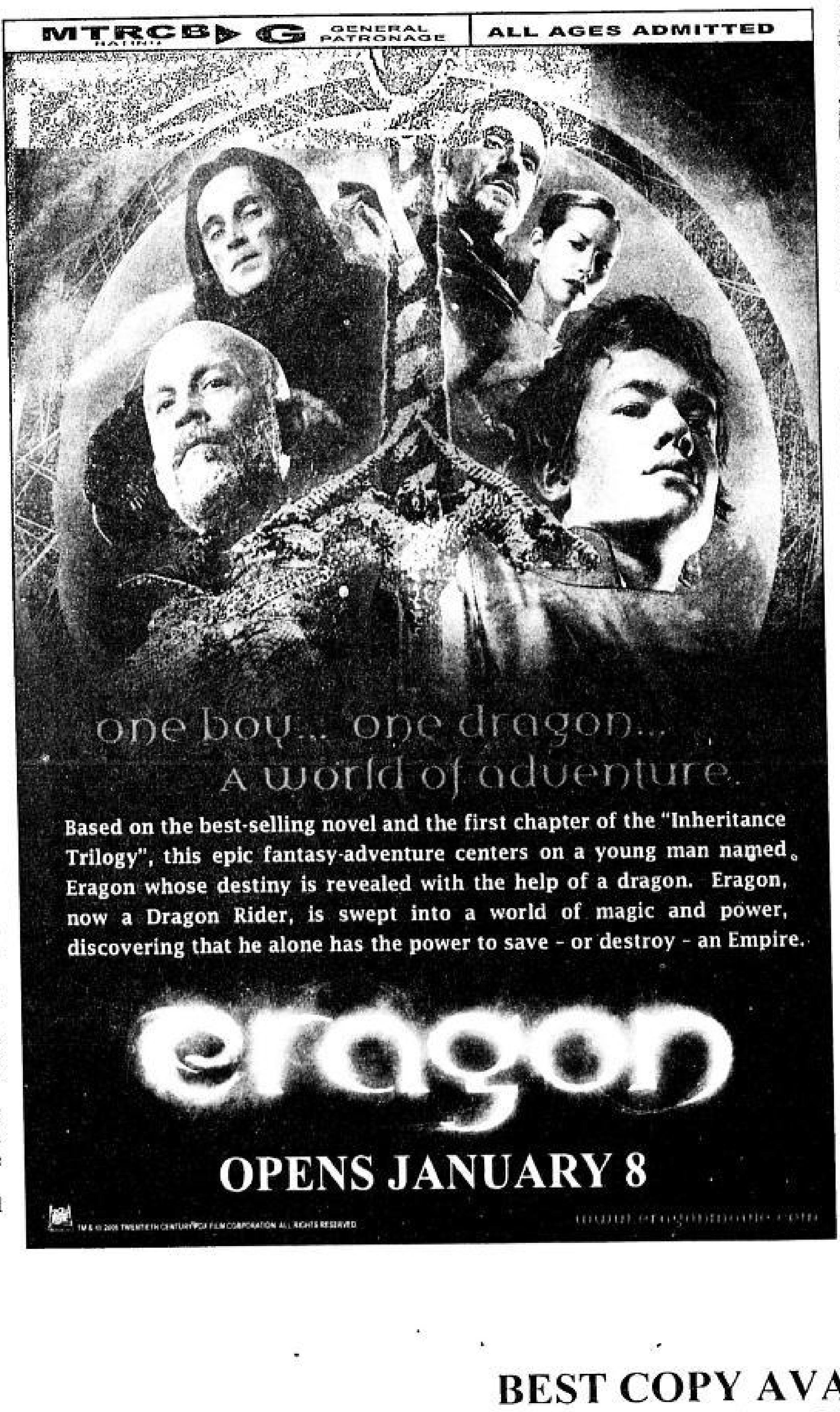

Based on the best-selling novel and the first chapter of the "Inheritance Trilogy", this epic fantasy-adventure centers on a young man named Eragon whose destiny is revealed with the help of a dragon. Eragon, now a Dragon Rider, is swept into a world of magic and power, discovering that he alone has the power to save - or destroy - an Empire.

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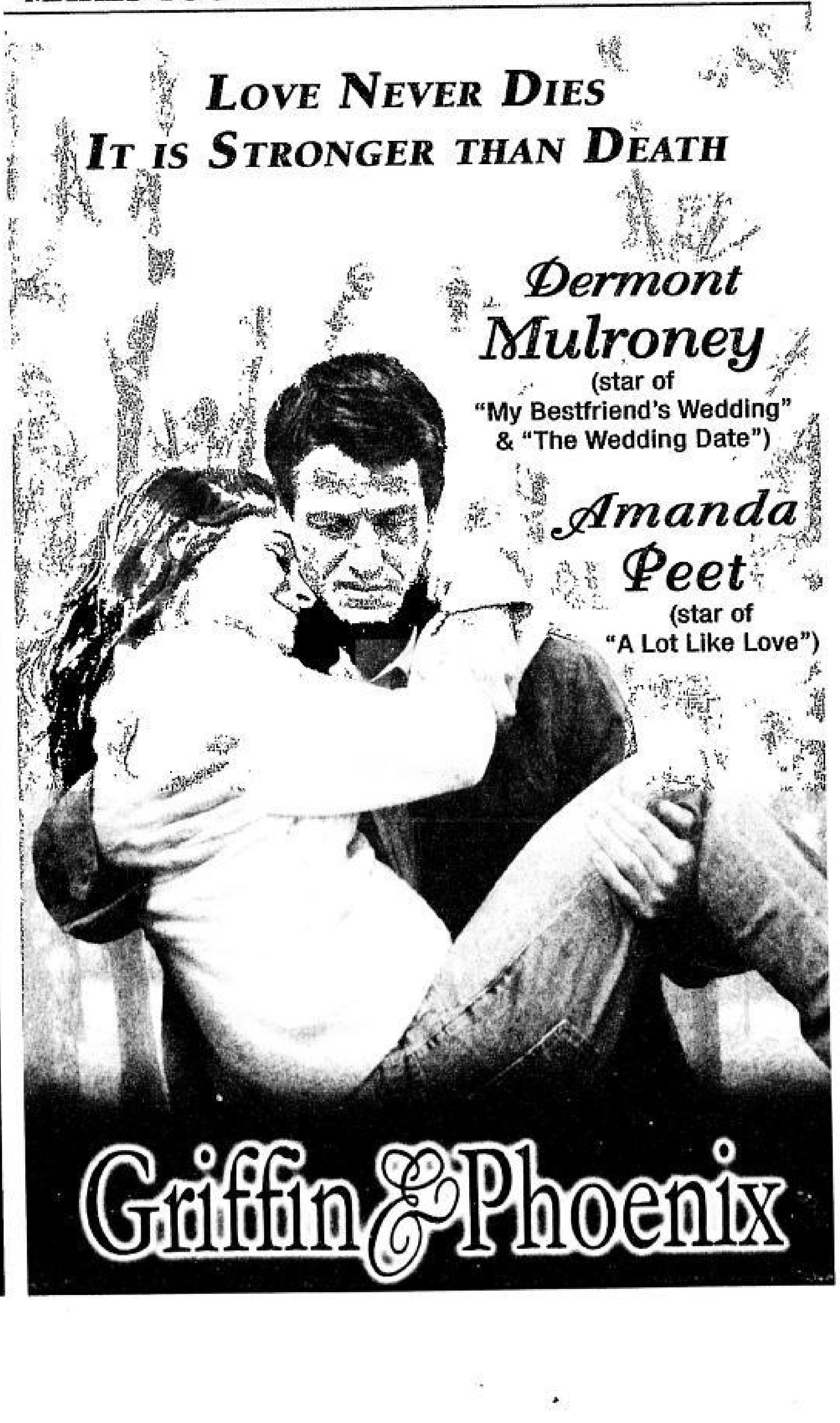
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Prince hopes to meet dad

By Nini Valera

PRINCE STEFAN, WHO SAYS HE IS THE SON of a Saudi Arabian prince—and whose mother is the daughter of a fish vendor from Tagbilaran, Bohol—are among the top 20 survivors in "Starstruck The Next Level," the reality-based talent search aired on GMA 7.

The 17-year-old, who now lives in Iloilo, hopes to meet his father through the contest.

Teary-eyed while answering questions from INQUIRER Entertainment last week, Prince admitted he made a mistake during initial interviews with the production staff when he said his father was from Israel, which is a Jewish state and not ruled by a monarchy.

He said his mother, an overseas contract worker, had been employed in the household of his father.

"Israel was the first country that came to my mind when I was asked where my father came from," Prince explained in Filipino.

If not for a scholarship, Rich Asuncion, 17, of Tagbilaran, Bohol, would not have been able to pursue a college education. But after winning a local beauty pageant, Rich, who said her name should have been Poor, got the scholarship.

"My mother sells fish," Rich said. "I would go with her sometimes. My father works as a janitor/messenger in a bank. But I am not about to let my circumstance in life get in the way of my dreams. I am a determined person."

Tough-luck tales

As usual, most of the survivors had tough-luck stories to tell during a meeting with media, prompting a member of the Starstruck Council to comment, "Is there nothing new?"

What's new is the excitement that always comes with the search, some network officials pointed out.

"This is really an exciting batch," said Wilma Galvante, senior vice president for GMA 7 Entertainment TV. "The entertainment group really took a close look at the top 60 until they were narrowed down to 20. So these survivors went though a rigid selection process."

PRINCE Stefan's sights go beyond the prize.

Tougher tests await the top 20, according to Galvante, as they go through a series of challenges that would determine how far they could survive and become stars.

The first elimination from the top group was set on New Year's Eve as "Starstruck The Next Level" went live at the Raja Sulayman Park on Baywalk in Manila.

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Lovi: Truly her dad's daughter

Show biz has made her grow up a little too fast

LOVI

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

WHEN SINGER-ACTRESS LOVI VISITED THE INQUIRER recently, she looked and sounded grown-up.

Gone was the baby fat of the cutesy teener launched as a record artist by Sony-BMG six months ago.

Lovi, who's turning 18 on Feb. 11, acknowledged that show biz made her grow up, a little too fast.

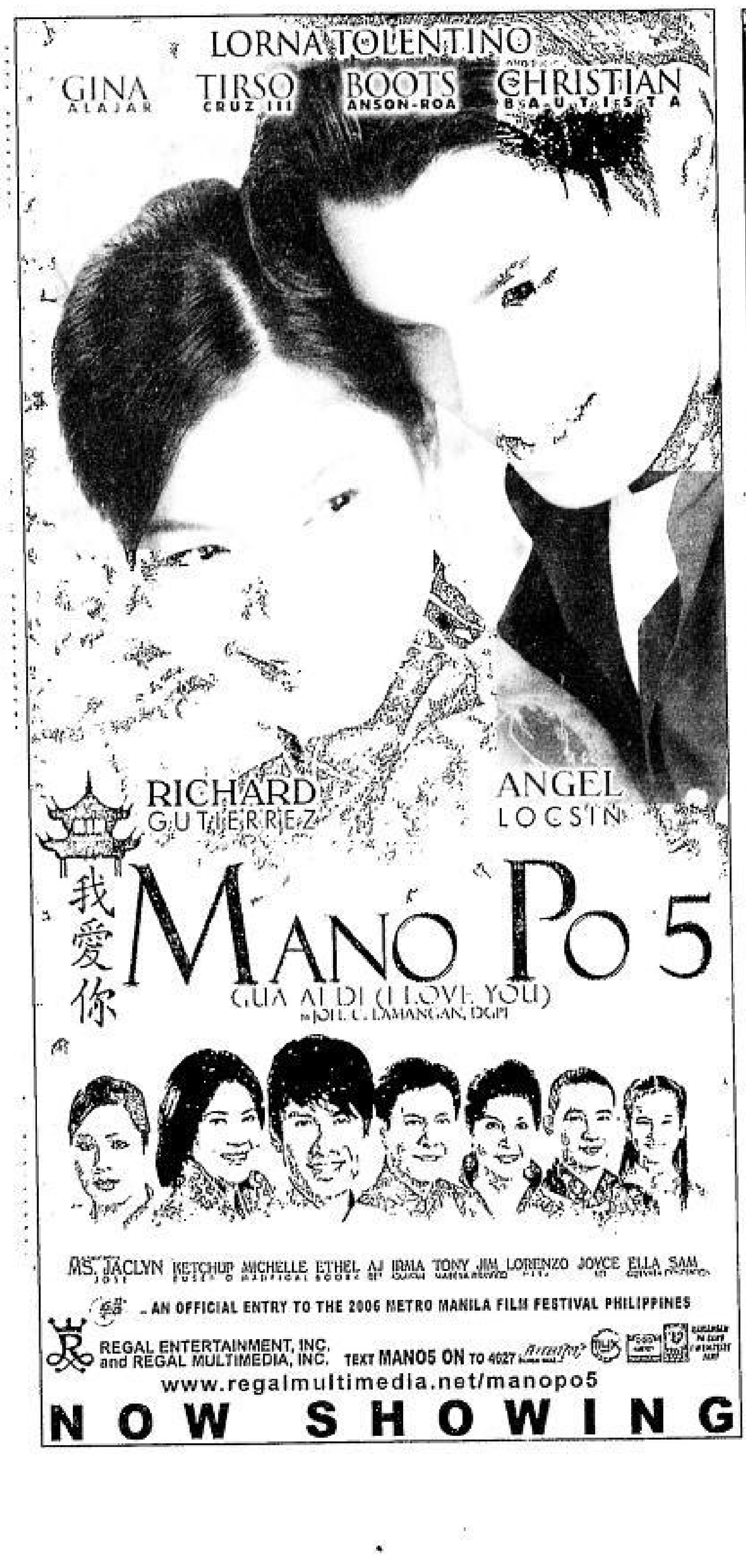
"I've undergone a big change," she admitted.

She said she opts to look at the bright side, though. "I am very happy for all the blessings. I didn't expect these big projects to come my way."

Apart from the debut CD, "The Best of My Heart," which spawned three singles ("I Love You," "I Never Knew Love" and "Everything You Wanted"), she waxed a duet with foreign act Same Same ("Without You") and was also tapped by GMA 7 to headline two shows ("Love to Love" and "Bakekang").

The flip side of overnight fame, however, is controversy, Lovi realized. And she has been showered with all sorts of intrigues of late: That she never met her dad, the late Action King Fernando Poe Jr.; and that she's not so

LOVI/ D2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ANGEL LOCSIN
我愛你
MANO PO 5
GUA AI DI (I LOVE YOU)
JOEL C. LAMANGAN, DGPI
MS. JACLYN JOSE
KETCHUP EUSEBIO
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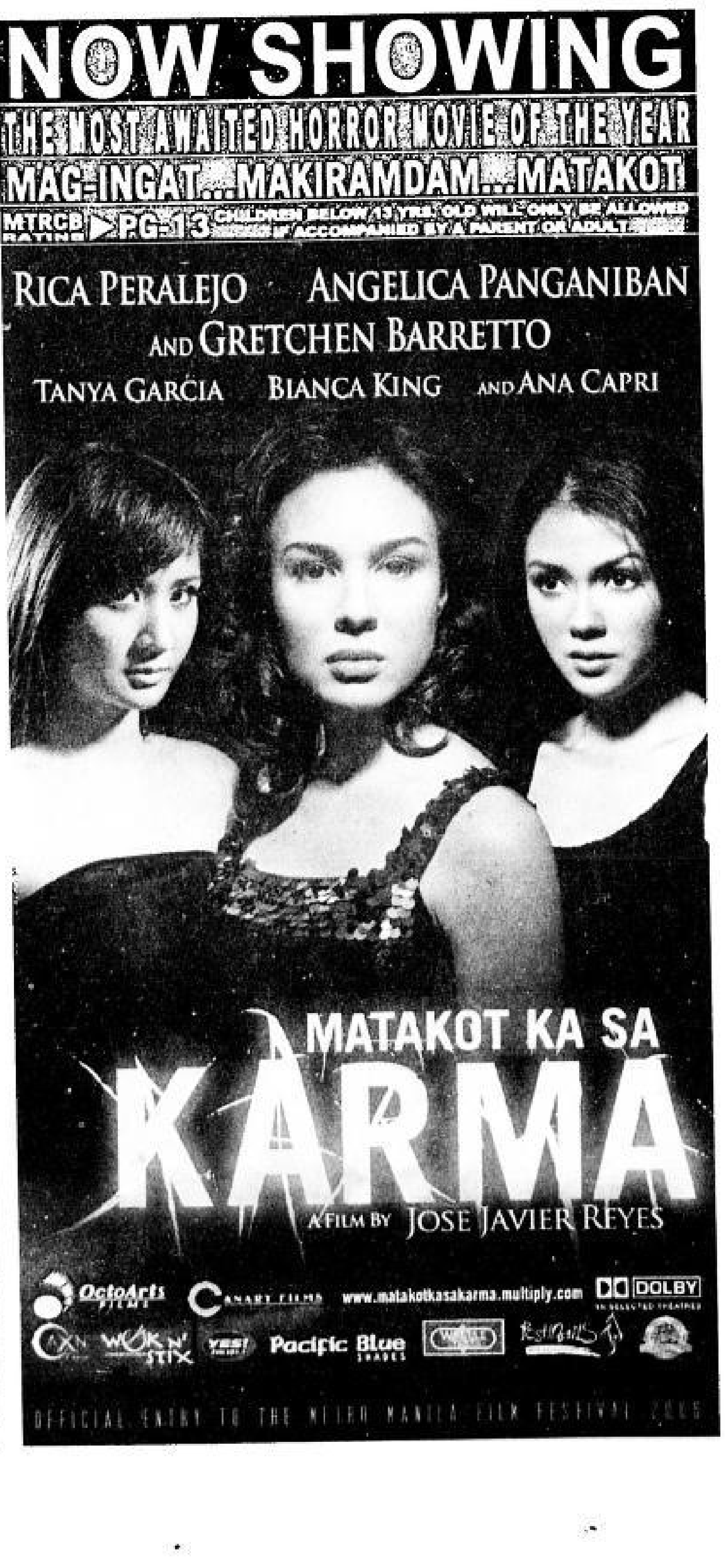
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